

THE ANCHOR

THE • ANCHOR

A LOVE
STORY

BY
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TO — MY
MOTHER



If they be two, they are two so
As stiff twin compasses are two ;
Thy soul, the fix'd foot, makes no show
To move, but doth, if t'other do.

And though it in the centre sit,
Yet, when the other far doth roam,
It leans, and hearkens after it,
And grows erect, as that comes home.

Such wilt thou be to me, who must,
Like t'other foot, obliquely run ;
Thy firmness makes my circle just,
And makes me end where I begun.

John Donne (circ. 1612).

J'étais si lourd, j'étais si las,
J'étais si vieux de méfiance,
J'étais si lourd, j'étais si las
Du vain chemin de tous mes pas.

Je méritais si peu la merveilleuse joie
Devoir tes pieds illuminer ma voie,
Que j'en reste tremblant encore et près qu'en pleurs,
Et humble, à tout jamais, en face du bonheur.

Emile Verhaeren (1912).

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CHAPTER ONE

IT was one of those distracting, unforgettable summer nights when Paris seems all the more heaven for the proximity of hell. The pavements were freckled and patterned from the street lamps gleaming wisely above the trees. It was very late—one o'clock and after—and the broad street was, if not empty, at least graciously roomy. A water-cart had passed by and the shining track it had left trailed off at the edges into a fringe of tiny rivulets, that nosed their way lazily through the dust and rubbish of the gutters or, here and there, curled themselves into little dust-glazed ponds. In the tree-tops a breeze flickered and, between the cool of the upper air and the freshness of the watered street, a tired belt of the day's heat hung wearily.

Laddie stopped to light his pipe. The match, its work done, glowed, warped, and snapped off. As he drew the first smoke, he shivered ever so slightly. But though the air struck chilly after the fetid atmosphere that he had left, he revelled in

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the placid beauty of the city he had that very evening come to hate. If it could always be thus, how he could love it ! A taxi rattled out of silence, through a space of harsh, lumbering noise, into silence again. He wondered where it was going, whom it carried. Some sordid intriguers probably ; his intolerant young lips curled the unspoken sneer. But once more the Paris night was shining, immensely, irresistibly serene, on the long boulevard with its kiosks, its hydrants, its rows of whispering trees. Resentment vanished as suddenly as it had come. Soothed and oblivious of everything but the blessed tranquillity of the air, he crossed the boulevard and struck down a side road. The noise of an opening window startled him. He looked towards the sound and saw a bare arm withdrawn between the curtains of an upstairs room. Immediately the nausea, that had that evening reached its climax, seized him once again, and he was recalled to the events of the night and to speculation as to what they would bring forth. He reflected, in the event of his being challenged by Dacre and of his refusing to fight, on the difficulties of continuing to live in Paris at all. On the other hand he had his job, and jobs could not be chucked up with impunity on private whims ; at least, if they were, there were apt to be complications in finding successors. There were two courses he might pursue, either of which would, in its way, solve the problem. He might fight ; or he might apologise. There was even a third possibility—that Dacre himself might let the matter drop. It

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was hard to decide which seemed the least improbable. He knew Dacre well enough to be sure that the man would miss no opportunity either of playing the theatrical or of parading his duelling skill. In a case such as this, offering the unique chance of doing both, to count on or even to presuppose renunciation would be the merest folly.

Equally futile was it to consider either an apology to Dacre or an acceptance of the gage he would most certainly throw down. The man was a swine, and one neither apologizes to swine nor fights with them. Incidentally, also, should they fight, Dacre would almost certainly kill or wound him, which in itself was undesirable.

Laddie scoffed at himself for the unworthiness of his last thought. He was for ever doing that, for ever rising to paladin heights of righteous indignation and then, so to speak, stepping off the anger that bore him upwards and tumbling into depths of selfishness or cowardice, from which he mocked the past to deaden the shame of the present. In this instance, the realization that perhaps his fine chivalry in regarding Dacre as an opponent whose challenge would be defilement was not unmixed with so common-sense and even base an instinct as self-preservation, killed his fervour of a minute gone as rapidly as the re-intrusion of humanity into his mind had brought it to life.

He began to question himself greedily. Had *he* been theatrical? Certainly it was unusual at twentieth-century parties for one guest to slash

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another across the face, even with an object so homely as a woman's garter. In addition, Dacre was certainly drunk, and convention gave greater licence to the drunk than to the sober. Why, Heaven alone knew. Finally, it was palpably the host's business to censor the conversation of his guests, not that one could expect Védier to censor anything. Laddie wondered whether he himself had been drunk. He was sober enough now, and he had, as far as he could remember, been sparing of refreshment during the evening. But the studio was foully hot, and a stuffy room combined with even moderate drinks might well render a man unexpectedly susceptible to a flash of anger. But why had he lost his temper then, rather than at any one of the hundred equally violent provocations offered earlier in the evening? Why, indeed, if he hadn't been drunk?

He began to answer himself. For one thing Dacre was such a brute. Laddie had always disliked him, and, as he sat and watched him that evening, his dislike had grown into loathing. The fellow treated that girl of his abominably; her very adoration of him seemed to make her a more exquisite victim for his cruelty. He disparaged her openly before them all, making her stand and posture before them, prodding and pinching her as though she were a prize sow, telling her her legs were too thin, that she was knock-kneed. She endured these insults and worse with a shrinking patience that was intolerable. Her misery was an embarrassment to the others, but, with the cynical

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aloofness that their world affected, they had made little protest. Chevrillon had tried to change the subject more than once. Védier's Jeanne, sitting as ever cross-legged on the divan, smoking cigarette after cigarette had called Dacre a savage and a slave-driver. But plainly the hostility was not very fierce and Dacre had persisted. The talk had turned to the *Indépendants* and "shows" in general; then to Freda Thurston, the American girl, whose huge marble group had been bought by a great collector and whose consequent leap into prominence was the gossip of every atelier. From Miss Thurston's art, Dacre had inevitably turned to a discussion of her person. He was drinking incessantly, and his face grew redder and his voice harsher as the spirit gradually mastered him. Laddie, unthinkingly, had taunted him with Miss Thurston's remoteness; her sudden success merely added a material and social barrier to the previous icy impregnability which divided her from Dacre and his kind. Instantly had come the hideous boast. Dacre's conception of triumph was of one kind only, and Miss Thurston should render full tribute. The theme was developed—with elaborations.

Laddie had sprung to his feet and, in a fury of disgust, picked up the first missile lying to hand and dashed it across the speaker's face.

"God damn you for a filthy swine!" he had cried. He was held and dragged back, while only a few feet away, struggling also in restraining arms, Dacre spat blood and venom at his

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adversary. It was then that Laddie had noticed his weapon to be one of Jeanne's garters. He had further observed, and with satisfaction, the ugly weal that was deepening across Dacre's swarthy cheek, for the garter was elaborate—with metal clasps. His anger froze into contempt. Setting his collar straight, he gently released the hands that held him and, with a curt good night to Védier, left the house.

Now, looking back on it all, he could not find it in him to be either unreservedly proud or wholly regretful of the affair. To have struck Dacre was almost a duty to society, but to have struck him under the roof of a common friend and with an undeniable lack of self-control was less admirable. Also, perhaps principally, there was the problem of the hereafter. He had been doing Paris correspondent and critic to the *Evening Herald* for less than two years, and, apart from the comparative insignificance of the job itself, such a period of service would hardly support a claim to promotion, based on the need for avoiding the results of a private quarrel. He knew the conventions of young Paris in matters of honour, and he realized that, if he refused to meet Dacre, many hitherto welcoming doors would be closed to him. As he fitted his key into the outer lock of his apartment-house, he smiled a little grimly. He doubted his capacity in the rôle of pariah; especially surrounded by the vivid intimacy of the writing-painting-lounging world, where everyone knows everyone else, and where the home is only tolerable

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as an extension of the café. Climbing the dark stairs, he entered his room and lit the lamp. As the light jerked into steadiness he saw on the table a telegram.

"Come home at once if you can mother has had a stroke father."

Laddie's first emotion was a blend of intense relief and its customary companion-feeling, self-contempt. Once more he scorned himself, this time for seeing in the telegram not tidings of family sorrow but an unexpected escape from a distasteful position. It was, indeed, amazingly opportune. The problem of the immediate future was solved; and as soon as he realized this, he swept the events and perplexities of the evening from his mind and weighed the news the telegram contained. It was not altogether unexpected; that is to say he knew vaguely that his mother had been for some years in a condition of weakness and depression, that an apparently Spartan rigidity of body and mind was only part of her unequal battle with the ultimate collapse. He felt no gush of grief nor even a momentary giddiness. He adapted himself methodically and coolly to the moment, automatically decided to take the 8 o'clock boat train and proceeded to pack his Gladstone bag.

As he did so, he repeated the words of the telegram over to himself. How utterly characteristic they were! His sympathy, once attached to the person of his father, grew and deepened. "Come home at once if you can"—considerate

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even at a crisis ; no peremptory command ; not even to save money and words. Extraordinary how few people sent telegrams without torturing their ingenuity and crippling their meaning by a ruthless pruning of words. It was like his father to write a sentence hardly different from one in a letter. Laddie's mind dwelt lovingly on the spacious gentleness of his father's life, his tireless energy and unflagging interest, his never-failing thoughtfulness and patience. Even his occasional awkwardness and untidiness were delicious. He never squeezed his tubes of lanoline and tooth-paste from the bottom, folding them up carefully, as instructed, so that they might not burst. He took infinitely greater care of other people's things than of his own. He lent to anyone who asked. Laddie despised his own neatness, his small economies of string and half-sheets of paper. He accused himself of hiding, under a false boast of practical tidiness, his envy of that gracious generosity that his father's life showed in its every detail. But at the same time he knew that he could never alter. His instinct in buying a paper was to wait for the halfpenny change. Every attempt he made—and at times he definitely tried to acquire his father's frankness in the small things of life—had a tinge of ostentation.

In his mood of hatred for humanity his adoration of his father became greater than ever. He remembered "discovering" his father, just after he had gone to Oxford. He had left school with a

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complete confidence in himself and a contempt for all elders, tutors, and their generation. He had left Oxford, depressed by his own worthlessness and full of a hero-worship for many men and nearly all women. Two years of Paris had taught him that men, even men living under the ægis and in the pursuit of beauty, could be mean, filthy, ungenerous; that women could be slavish, cynical in their wantonness, pitiless in their greed. Dacre and his words had revealed the sickening orgy which had once seemed a joyous freedom. Paris, the ideal mistress, was only a harlot after all, with a harlot's perfume and a harlot's passion, at the mercy of the wealthiest or the most complacent. His father seemed to Laddie the only idol standing. Wherefore he rejoiced to be summoned to his side, and the tragedy of his mother's sickness could not lessen the spontaneity and the splendour of that joy.

It was three o'clock. He could not sleep and there was little more than four hours before he must start for the station. He finished his packing and strapped his bag; then, lighting another pipe, leant on the sill of his fourth floor window and waited for the dawn.

CHAPTER TWO

THE taxi jolted down the cobbled hill towards the river, and at each lurch of the cab the battered Gladstone bag with its blurred initials swayed and threatened to topple on to its owner's feet. A specially violent jerk reminded Laddie that he had not altered the label. It was an old label, a relic of some long-past journey, but it still clung, in limp and disreputable defiance, to the handle of the bag. Its survival seemed an insult to his usual tidy foresight. Leaning forward and dodging as best he might the capricious movement of the vehicle, Laddie scribbled "Macallister—London, via Calais", in illegible pencil, scrubbed through the earlier address and threw himself back into his seat with a sudden irritation at the trouble of addressing labels at all, and a sense of the uselessness of the particular way in which he had just addressed this one. His eyes were smarting and his skin was dry and tired. The emotions of the night had barely upheld him throughout his vigil and they had now frankly evaporated. He felt dirty and sweaty. The feathered gold of the morning sunlight was an irksome heat. He shuddered at the prospect of the roar and bustle of the journey. With physical

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exhaustion the heroics of last night had shrunk to hectic posturing. They would think he had simply run away ; that he had funked meeting Dacre. Uneasily he admitted the moment of relief that his forced departure had caused him. He seized on his uneasiness, in his inevitable way, as a refuge from his finer self. Let them think him a coward ; their rotten opinion did not matter to him. He wrenched his mind into a state of self-pity, seeing himself as a sport of fate, a lost child at cross-roads. His mother was perhaps dying. But, as ever, his power of self-mockery came once more to the rescue and he wondered ironically whether the being who had, until that moment, been himself, had not consciously striven to look wistful, had not purposely swept the street with mournful eyes, large and pitiful. Lashed by this taunt of insincerity into facing the present without emotional subterfuge, he found to his own joy that Dacre and the others really mattered very little. He no longer wished to defy them—such a wish was in itself a presupposition of their importance ; it led unfailingly to a tableau of himself against the world. No : they were just the past, and his mother—or more correctly his father—was the future. As for the present—it was just this leaping, fleeting taxi-cab with its freight of hot-eyed, irritable young journalist and sorely shaken but uncomplaining Gladstone bag.

The houses were now taller, grimmer and, in the sunlight, more matter-of-fact, than those Laddie knew best of all. He had assumed the

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hatred of the Opera and Terminus districts which quartier convention demanded, and he found that his new dislike of the south side had not reconciled him to the north. A money-grubbing, unreliable district, with its too expensive shops and its tiers of windows that were sinister at dusk and unscrupulous at dawn. The jaded façade of the Gare du Nord was almost a relief; its feeble inadequacy of design hinted at England, and England above all things seemed desirable now. He felt he could not have borne to set out for home from some pinked and garlanded monstrosity of a railway station. His bitter mood recalled with contempt the pretentious futility of the Gare d'Orsay. Typically French, he said to himself. Undoubtedly things were bad that morning.

Consistent at least in his absurdity (he knew it was absurd and he tortured himself by a deliberate exaggeration of contrariness), he bought a day old English newspaper for four times its value, a Tauchnitz edition of *Three Men in a Boat* (a book he hated, but to him at the moment as utterly un-French as anything he could remember) and a street map of London that for some curious reason was lingering forlornly in a corner of the station bookstall. Between the securing of a corner seat and the departure of the train was a period of ten minutes, during which he swallowed a cup of coffee and a crescent roll. Somehow there had been no time for breakfast before starting. Sitting up all night is absorbing work.

He was in his corner, wondering why in the

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world he had bought a paper he didn't want to read and a novel he knew by heart, and savagely criticizing the hat and boots of a neat little Frenchman in the seat opposite, when the train twitched into motion and there came from the corridor a scuffle and a series of violent thuds. Determined to be miserable and dead to natural instincts of curiosity, Laddie killed his impulse to look towards the corridor. Instead he studied the little Frenchman, hoping in this bitterly reprobated mirror to see a distorted reflection of the unexplained commotion. The little Frenchman, after blinking once or twice and snorting gently, opened his eyes with such genuine astonishment that Laddie forgot his entrenched grievance and turned his head. His first impression was that a loaded Christmas tree was endeavouring to force its way into the compartment. An inchoate and swaying mass of bags, parcels, newspapers and walking-sticks hung a moment in the narrow doorway and then shot forward on to the seat next him. A heavy handbag was dropped on his elbow, an umbrella spiked his leg. The remaining accoutrements of the Christmas-tree fell and slithered one by one on to the floor and seats of the compartment, and revealed their owner to the ferocious gaze of Laddie and the slightly shocked amazement of the Frenchman. He was rather a stout and very bewildered-looking young Englishman, with a large, highly coloured face and pince-nez. His hat perched very much forward on a mat of long, red-brown hair. He was very hot and very

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flustered. In his mouth a bruised and weather-beaten pipe trailed a forlorn whisker of singed but unburnt tobacco. There was something so comically pathetic about the new-comer's troubled and childlike expression that Laddie's annoyance changed to sympathy. He realized that this stranger probably felt much as he himself had felt half an hour ago, and his obvious patience under adversity called forth a pang of admiring remorse. Impulsively he stooped down and began collecting such scattered possessions as could be seen on the floor.

"Thank you, thank you," murmured the young man abstractedly, his eyes roaming in vague despair over the rack. He seemed to make up his mind at last and, with a grunt and a grimace, hoisted an enormous kit-bag into an empty space. He opened his mouth in the struggle and the pipe fell from his teeth, bounced off the edge of the seat and struck the metal top of the heating apparatus in the floor so violently that it broke in half.

"Oh, damn!" said the young man, without conviction. He picked up the fragments and fumbled with them. He seemed to have some idea that if he held them in place long enough they would grow together again. So complete was his absorption in the ruins of his pipe, that the ceremony of repair acquired a character of privacy. Feeling that further scrutiny would be indelicate, and seeing that no attempt was yet to be made to clear up the litter of belongings that strewn

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the compartment, Laddie withdrew his eyes and watched for a time the drab tenements of northern Paris through which they were now travelling at increasing speed. The houses seemed to shoot towards the train, threatening to block its way, and then as suddenly skip away again in mock alarm. Laddie amused himself in pretending that they were indeed seeking to fall upon the travellers and crush them. He even congratulated himself and the engine driver as a more than usually ferocious block of buildings lunged at the compartment and was successfully eluded.

As they swung thus, clattering through the northern slums, Laddie had his last glimpse of the soul of the city that only yesterday he had ceased to love. A lower window of a barrack block of flats stood open, and at this window, in the shuddering moment of their passage, he saw a woman, half-naked, waving at the train. . . .

His attention was recalled to his fellow-traveller by the painful sound of humanity in distress. The red-haired young man was vainly coaxing a large, flat, suit-case, which had got securely wedged under the seat, towards the centre of the floor. Laddie's eyes reached the arena in time to see the sudden yielding of the suit-case, while his feet left it too late to avoid painful contact with a quickly moving corner. He swore. The red-haired young man was abject.

"I'm so sorry! The beastly thing stuck. . . ."
His harassed bewilderment disarmed Laddie utterly.

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"Do you always travel with so much luggage?" he asked.

"Well—when I've time, I register it, but I was called too late and had to hurry to catch the train at all."

He ran his plump fingers through the mat of hair that lolled on his forehead. A gradual calm stole into his eyes; he seemed to reflect a moment and then, quite suddenly, gave a loud and spasmodic chuckle. It was the most alluring and infectious sound Laddie had ever heard, and involuntarily he laughed aloud. The stranger turned towards him, his whole face alight with laughter.

"You should have seen them!" he giggled, and his words came in little bursts of delight. "All in a row like a lot of hens, with their heads stuck forward and their mouths open, and father in front spluttering with fury and shouting 'Wee! Wee! May . . . !' and the collector waving his arms and trickling gestures and queer little chirruping sounds . . . !"

He lay back in his seat and laughed amazingly.

Laddie, without the smallest knowledge of what it was all about, laughed nearly as heartily. This extraordinary young man was irresistible; his whole body shook as he laughed, and his great thighs billowed and quaked. When the laughs had both subsided, neither seemed to remember the incongruity of the position and turned quite naturally to each other for conversation. The red-haired young man produced a vast cigarette-

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case that must have encircled a fair segment of his body in its shining curve, opened it after a struggle and offered Laddie a cigarette. Laddie, in return, supplied a match. His new acquaintance took the conversation in hand from the beginning. He chattered charmingly about every conceivable subject, strewing himself, the seat, and even Laddie with cigarette ash, and every now and again breaking out into his adorable, chuckling laugh.

"Unbelievable," thought Laddie, "that this can be Amiens already!" But Amiens it was, and the train was sliding into the familiar half-light of the station when the red-haired young man muttered something about a newspaper, blundered to his feet and fumbled with the window next which Laddie sat, with the apparent intention of opening it. He made so little progress that Laddie came to his help, and soon the young man was leaning half out of the carriage, bawling with gusty perseverance for a "joornl." More by good fortune than merit, his cries attracted a newsboy and a *Matin* was selected. The purchaser's pockets were very deep or his trousers very tight, for it cost much effort to extract the necessary money, and the rebound was so severe that the young man knocked his head against the top of the window and his hat on to the platform. ("Why did he put his hat on at all?" wondered Laddie.) It was returned, dusty, amid some excitement, as the train moved out and the young man, panting somewhat, fell back into

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his place with the paper that had cost so much exertion.

It soon became evident that, in his opinion, the ceremony of newspaper reading should be conducted in the same manner as undressing. As he finished a page he shed it on the floor like a garment; the inner strata of the newspaper slipped loose and hung, unfolded and uncared for. It was not long before his hunched shoulders and untidy head rose above a froth of crumpled and wide-strewn sheets of newspaper. It could not be all *Matin*; of course he had other papers with him. He reminded Laddie of one of those conjurors who produce unending streamers of coloured paper from a top-hat full of rabbits. There seemed no limit to the quantity of newspaper which the red-haired young man would snow over the compartment.

"It takes me about three minutes to read a newspaper," Laddie observed at last. "However do you find so much to interest you?"

The stranger lifted a dazed and absent face.

"I was reading last night's debate," he said mildly.

"Then it's not all *Matin*," commented Laddie, half to himself.

"Oh, I finished the *Matin* long ago. This is the *Morning Post*."

After the suspense and agitation of forcing their way on to the boat, the two young men found themselves standing together by the rail of the

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upper-deck. Luggage was creaking and swinging on board, passengers were buzzing and twittering, the many-coloured houses of old Calais were winking in the brilliant sunshine.

"What a day!" sighed Laddie. "How heavenly England will look. What's your name?"

"Gill—Dermot Gill," replied the red-haired young man, in a flat but genial tone, as though he were saying the name of his tailor.

"An Irishman?"

"Of course," proudly.

"Then why do you read the *Morning Post*?"

"Because I hate it less than the Liberal morning papers. I never read the leaders, you see, or anything like that."

"And in the evening?"

"Oh, the *Westminster*. A splendid paper!"

Laddie shrugged.

"I'm no politician, I fear, and hate newspapers, probably because I write for one."

"Really? Which one—and what do you write about?"

For all the polite interest there was the merest tinge of condescension in Gill's voice. It was the inevitable voice of the politician to his servant journalist.

Laddie, in such cases, always went straight to the point.

He retorted laughingly :

"You suspect me of being an interviewer and about to pull wires to meet the Cabinet. No need for alarm. I write picture and book notices and

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sort of general gossip from Paris for the *Evening Herald*."

Dermot Gill was blushing and confused. He had not realized, until implicitly charged, that his attitude had been in the smallest degree superior. The thought that it had been so gave him very real pain. Too honest to slur over his own indelicacy, he apologized :

"I really didn't mean . . . please forgive me. . . . I suppose I ought to have seen. . . ."

Laddie laughed again and insisted, a little cruelly :

"My name is Macallister. I'm Public School, too—Winchester and Oxford. To sink so low . . . !"

Gill was genuinely distressed. This mocking young man alarmed and worried him. He made a desperate effort to save the day :

"But I'm an O.E. We play you—you know."

The inconsequence of the remark was pitiable. Laddie, by now angry with himself for his own useless pride and persistence, choked down a further sneer. Rather apprehensive, he waited for his companion to speak.

Mortified and miserable, Dermot Gill stood for a moment in uneasy silence. Then his kindly simple mind forgot its grievance and he began to beam quietly.

"Watch that old lady—the one with the string-bag—she means to get the sheltered seat or make its present tenant's life a burden, if he won't shift !"

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Following the other's glance Laddie stood in silent contemplation of one of the small comedies of travel. When the fiendish selfishness of the old lady with the string-bag had finally overcome the victim's opposition, Gill's fascinating chuckle obliterated the last memory of the awkwardness of a few moments past.

Laddie was, by nature, singularly incurious. He had asked his companion's name for convenience rather than for interest's sake and now felt no impulse to further enquiry, particularly since the trying little scene just enacted. Dermot, on the other hand, proceeded to pile question upon question until his inquisitiveness became an oppression. Laddie first generalized, then fenced, finally lied, in his determination to remain, in essentials, a stranger. At last occurred retaliation, as a desperate, forlorn expedient. It answered admirably and the red-haired young man began and continued to talk. Laddie spent a few moments collecting his wits. The recent contretemps still worried him. Was it not a form of snobbery as vile as any other, this tendency to insist on one's mediocrity? But he realized that Gill had completely forgotten the incident, that any attempted apology would seem unmeaning and absurd. He wrenched his mind to what the other was saying—comparative attractions of screw and paddle steamers, of fair and dark girls, of thick and clear soup. . . .

"Quite . . ." he murmured, and slid into the conversation.

When they got to Dover and were, by tacit

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agreement, settled in the same compartment for London, they were talking intimately enough of recent doings. Gill was on his way home from Italy. He had, it appeared, left Cambridge four years ago because it bored him, and plunged into a maze of politics, social work, and queer, undigested travel.

Laddie listened with placid amusement to his new friend's stream of conventional comment on what he had seen. An eager reference to the Primitives made it immediately clear that, to Gill, the Giotto at Padua, the Spanish Chapel, Ravenna, Assisi, and the various Byzantine Meccas of the advanced artistic mind were merely paragraphs in Baedeker—to be visited, of course, but not comparable to the Correggios at Parma, the Rotonda in the Uffizi, the Arch of Constantine or St. Peter's at Rome. Dermot spoke with gentle appreciation of the Campagna ; he had not stopped at Orvieto ; Rimini was too far out of the way. With most people—perhaps even with Gill, was not the contretemps on board still vivid in his mind—Laddie would have been intolerantly curt. Few things roused him so much as the complacent acceptance of beauty because it was old, which so often marked even the intelligent British tourist. To his passionate fondness for noble painting, noble sculpture, noble literature, the uncritical meanderings of the traveller to whom art is a holiday, were exasperating and impertinent. Let them try amateur strategy on a soldier or babble about medicine to a doctor ! What right

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had they to talk about art? What smallest morsel of insight into the manifold but splendidly coherent genealogies of style and taste did they pretend to gain by trailing idiotically round the Louvre, the Prado, or the Brera, by their occasional reading of Loti, Fogazzaro, or Hauptmann, when Balzac, Dante, and Goethe were mere names? And in this he would never admit himself mistaken. He had, only too fully for his own comfort, the power of piercing his self-deceptions, but he knew his subject in this case moderately well, far better than the persons he criticized so savagely, and, armed with this knowledge, he felt strangely confident.

Dermot Gill, however, was curiously bearable, even at his most platitudinous moments. Every now and again he would stop the flow of parrot appreciation to utter some vivid, humorous aside, something observed with that unerring and personal sense of the comic, that seemed his most delicious characteristic.

As the other talked, Laddie watched the English country slipping past and felt it was the most beautiful and satisfying sight he had ever seen. He had not been home for more than a year, a year which had seen the final maturing of his dislike of Paris and its people, and his heart yearned over the green and ordered richness of the Kentish summer. The rows of hops winked with kaleidoscopic regularity, now fluttering past diagonally so that the watcher seemed to hear the trill of their rapid succession, now drawing the eye into

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one geometrical vista after another, each vista separated by a vibrating, fan-shaped flash of brown, foreshortened sticks. The train toiled up the bank of the downs; there were tunnels, the sunlight gushing over the travellers like brilliant water as they emerged from the noise and darkness; there were wayside stations with their attendant huddle of hideous, inappropriate and amazingly welcome little houses; finally there were the nonchalant but strangely thrilling fringes of London itself.

At this point Laddie remembered the street-map he had bought in Paris. He began to follow their route. The drab expanse of New Cross fascinated him; he tried to grasp the character of the streets as they flicked past, below the viaduct.

"I must come here," he thought, "and find a reason for all this."

When the train jerked to a standstill at Charing Cross he was already in the grip of the problem of those vast spaces of London, which, with no landmark and no apparent function, merely and overwhelmingly exist.

CHAPTER THREE

I

ALMOST immediately in the taxi, after a hasty parting from Gill, the reaction set in. Its beginning was undeniably an intellectual one, academic rather than vital. That is to say, Laddie challenged himself, as, more than once on the journey, he had been on the point of doing. He charged himself with callousness on the subject of his mother's illness. His mind, still full of the self-centred emotions that had swept him to the Gare du Nord, undoubtedly expected the accusation of indifference to be met with mock regret, set off by, as background, a barely perceptible shrug. Perhaps he would half congratulate himself on his stoicism, his modernity, his originality—call it what you will—which enabled him, in circumstances commonly considered a trial of fortitude, to maintain an interest in the life of the world, an interest in his fellow-travellers, above all an interest in himself. Be that as it might, he was genuinely surprised to find that his artificial attempt to tap probably non-existent reservoirs of grief was greeted with a well-nigh overwhelming rush of misery. He was literally on the verge of

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tears, but his power of self-criticism rallied and reminded him that young Englishmen seldom weep in taxis. He mastered his tears and sat, staring dully from the open taxi at the panorama of London sliding by, utterly absorbed in the thought that his mother was dying.

Why was the thought so moving? Was it merely the words and their association? "My mother is dying"—a tremble of sorrow, a break in a strong man's voice, cinema heroics—was that all? No, that was not all. But what else? For years he had not really been intimate with his mother. They had had no breach; worse, infinitely worse in its elusive vagueness. He had never been at ease with her; she dominated him, but did not convince; he trembled before her, but never lost the conviction that she was wrong or unjust or obstinate or unsympathetic and that he was right. A second surprise. He no longer felt this; it was not his feeling for his mother at all. Someone else had spoken; it was all a lie. Then he understood; it was the old habit of mind speaking. Just as, when leaving Charing Cross, the Paris thoughts were still alive in his brain until the new vitality had borne them down, so now the machine of his former parrot-like belief (how bitterly conventional and unreflecting it had been!) in his mother's incompatibility with himself was still, with its moribund but faintly animate impetus, slowly driving the wheels of his mind along their old grooves of selfish insincerity. A wonderful new impetus seized him. A conception,

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utterly new, at once shaming and glorifying, rose up within him. He saw his mother, now that she was dying, no longer as a shadow, a recurrent check and terror in his past life, but rather as a double symbol, a symbol of courage and self-sacrifice. "Now that she was dying." Horrible ! The fighter had gone under ; the hideous enemy had triumphed. All those silent, uncomplaining years of heroism had gone for nothing, save perhaps to gain a few more miserable months. And he had never cared ! At the thought of his own blindness, the tears choked him suddenly, tears of fury, tears of bittersweet repentance. He saw, for the first time, a thousand indications of the struggle she had waged ; hardness, they had seemed ; courage, they were now recognised to be.

The arrival at Paddington, the porters, the luggage, the finding of the platform, passed like a landscape seen from the window of a flying train. The longing to make reparation, the poignant memories of the past, the wild gleams of hope for the future, cherished but known as vain, gripped his mind and shook it in their grip. Curiously he had no fear that she would die before he came. In an aside he taunted himself for his certainty ; she would hardly struggle to live for *him* ; perhaps she did not expect that he would come at all. Pre-sumption to assume that she would live for *him* ! But all the same he knew she was not yet dead. Could she speak ? Could she recognize those about her ? He knew no details ; she might be a mere

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breathing corpse, impotent, revoltingly pitiable. Or would she tear his heart with a melancholy forgiveness ? He could not bear that ; the self-hatred was too recent to bear gracious generosity, even the generosity of the dying. The only tolerable reception would be no reception at all. He found himself praying fervently for her unconsciousness.

There was no one to meet him. Rather naturally. He had never announced his coming. He passed unseeing the salutation of his friend* the station-master. It was over a year since he was here and the station-master knew why he had come and pitied him. As he walked towards home, he felt a terrible unwillingness to arrive. They must all recognize him for the brute he had been. Only his infernal self-complacency had hidden their contempt from his consciousness. He quivered at the thought of Christine's look, her forced gentleness : "How dear of you to come," and he would hear the unspoken corollary : "I never thought you would."

Of Robert he had less fear. Robert was fallible in other ways. But even his honest scorn would sear ; in Robert's world men loved their mothers only second to their country. A spasm of jealousy for Robert's world, with its simple, unquestioning standards of gentlemen and bounders, of decent feelings and morbidity, shook him and passed. There remained his father. How would his father look ?

And even as he wondered, a hand was on his

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shoulder and he raised his head to meet his father's eyes. They were brave and kindly eyes, as ever, though the lines about them were now rigid and angular with sorrow and anxiety. But, most important of all, they contained no hint of reproach. Incredible, but through their sadness shone a light of welcome.

"Good boy," his father said. "You're in time to see her. I'm awfully glad to have you again, old chap!"

Nothing more than that ; but all Laddie's fears, grovellings, and bitterness vanished in an instant. He gripped his father's arm in silence and they passed into the house.

They went straight upstairs. At the door of the bedroom that had always, so long as Laddie could remember, been associated with his mother, the rector paused.

"You understand, of course," he said in a low voice, "that she cannot speak."

Laddie nodded, and passed into the familiar room. In a fleeting second he had a vision of the great wardrobe he had been frightened of as a child, of the twisted candlesticks on the mantelpiece he had loved to play with ; he had a sense of the old smell of the room, a curious, rather intimidating smell of great simplicity and cleanliness. But then the unfamiliar features loomed over him and blotted out the rest. The bed had been moved ; there were strange vessels and bottles on the washstand ; a bedside table with one iron leg very much to one side and two long claws along

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the floor to redress the balance, stood near the window in the place of the arm-chair that had always been there ; a strange figure in nurse's costume hovered somewhere, in the background of his vision. Finally he saw his mother. She lay on her back, with her head slightly towards the door, and the wide-open eyes seemed to fix him with a horrible, unnatural obliqueness ; they must have been looking at him from the moment he entered the room. He went and stood by the bed. The eyes gazed straight into his ; the long, wasted body under the bedclothes moved not a muscle. For a moment the tension was enormous ; Laddie felt his brain reel, his pulses race madly. But just as it seemed something must snap, the message of those great, unblinking eyes became, as it were, audible to him. He understood that they were at peace and that they invited him to share their happiness ; he understood that they spoke in one supreme extraordinary moment of time, a splendid welcome and a tender, comforting farewell. He dropped on his knees at his mother's side and buried his head in his arms. He was, in that second, once again a little child.

II

Mrs. Macallister died very early the following morning. She neither moved nor made any sign of wishing to do so. The actual death was an un-

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disguised relief to the household. At breakfast they were almost normal together. It seemed the Rector had not telegraphed to his sons until the end was known to be inevitable and near. It had all come so quickly. The dead woman's iron control had not hidden from her doctor the imminence of collapse. But his commands were unavailing against her too great reliance on nerves and brain, her sense of endurance. And the crumbling of that stark, unflinching will had left only a void ; it seemed she must have lived for months by power of will alone.

Robert Macallister, the soldier son, had come before Laddie, because his journey was a shorter one. In that time of unreality between Laddie's afternoon arrival and the formal separation of the family to their bedrooms the brothers had sat together in the large room at the top of the house, that had been nursery, school-room, Laddie's sitting-room, and, finally, Christine's work-room through the shifting stages of the family and their growth. They hardly spoke to each other, sucking their pipes in big arm-chairs and staring out of the open windows across the haphazard bunchiness of the little town. Robert had groped, in his simple way, at the mystery of grief.

"Funny thing," he grunted. "Makes me feel kind of not there. I wondered whether I was goin' to cry. Often used to wonder how one cried."

"Don't, Bob. You've no regrets."

"Regrets ? How ? I've been cursin' meself

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for a dam swine to her, if that's what you mean. Funny how one misses chances of bein' jolly to people till it's too late."

"Oh, Bob, if you only knew. You'd never believe me if I told you things I've thought about her, things that came into my mind even on my way home from Paris. It's not a pleasant discovery, one's own selfishness, and there has been a glitter about my selfishness that is like iridescence on foul meat."

"I say, old chap, don't talk like that. I know you fellows have all kinds of clever ideas and all that, but there's no point gassin' about bad meat, you know. It's all rot."

Laddie did not reply. A flicker of the old mockery reminded him how, formerly, he would have ridiculed Robert's unconscious joke. But now his brother's clumsy comfort revived his tears, and he could not trust his voice. They sat on in the gathering dusk and the smoke swayed in a filmy curtain above their heads.

But at breakfast the first feeling of impotence had passed away. There was now something active to be done, arrangements to be made, even a suggestion of a future, with its plans and its possibilities. The helpless waiting was over. Christine did not come down, but the three men talked almost naturally of dates and dispositions. After breakfast they went to the study and smoked a while. In itself this was a sign of returning normality. The study had been the Rector's pride and hobby

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for years. Its skilful restoration and patiently collected furniture were famous among connoisseurs. The room had been part of a fifteenth-century monastery, and, after being reclaimed from disuse, had been so treated as to achieve a perfect blend of its Gothic origin and the needs of modern comfort. The claims it made on the Rector's purse had been, in the past, causes of difference between him and his wife. During her last illness an unexpressed self-reproach had kept him away from it. Laddie, who loved the room as dearly as his father did, had carefully avoided it, vaguely for the same reason. Now, however, its ancient beauty called to their new tranquillity of mind, and the pale Gothic oak, the whitewashed walls, the dim old rugs, wrapped soothingly in their gracious simplicity the tired spirits of the mourners.

Another feeling, curiously the reverse of what had been, tended to identify this room with the dead woman. Her very disapproval of it made it precious and melancholy.

Laddie it was who drew the logical conclusion—

"Will you stay on here now, Reverend?"

"It's curious; I was just thinking of the same thing. I don't believe I shall. What do you feel?"

"Where will you go?" asked Robert.

"Marsden said something a month or two ago about Chester. I didn't consider the matter seriously, of course, at that time; there seemed

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no reason for leaving here. Perhaps we might consider it now."

"Canonry, I suppose?" said Laddie.

His father nodded. For a time no one spoke.

"It's tragic to think of leaving this room. Could you take it with you?"

"I should take everything movable, but it would be a desecration to touch the building."

"Some awful people will come and put ornaments on the mantelpiece, I expect, or use it as a lumber-room," commented Laddie gloomily.

The Rector sighed.

"Well, it can't be helped if they do. The latter won't be a new experience for it, anyhow," he added.

Though nothing more was said on the matter, all three felt somehow that it was settled and that the twenty years' sojourn at Stansfield St. Mary was nearly over. During the period of funeral preparation the idea took root, and the regrets mellowed into acceptance.

It was a week later that the subject arose once more. Robert had gone back to his regiment and Laddie, his father and sister were alone.

Christine had at first felt that her mother's death left her own life useless, empty. For some time she had taken a large share of the house-keeping and parish work off her mother's shoulders, but Mrs. Macallister had remained a source of advice and had been applied to for final decisions on every important matter. Her disappearance left Christine's gentle, unoriginal nature in lonely

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bewilderment. She was like a train without its engine ; she still had her cargo of passengers and luggage, but the motive power was gone. Though this condition of daze and listlessness was passing away slowly, she took up the interrupted strands of her manifold activities more from habit than from real interest. The idea of leaving Stansfield St. Mary never occurred to her. Hers was not the mind to plan great changes or upheavals. The news that a move was contemplated came to her, then, as a sudden relief, a way of escape from the uselessness of her work now that her mother was dead.

"I've written to the Bishop," announced the Rector one evening.

And in a moment they were discussing the change that was to come.

"I thought we might get a house on the moors. I only have to live in Chester for three months each year," suggested Mr. Macallister.

And they talked the evening out, speaking of houses and the new life.

III

It was characteristic of the terms on which Laddie and his father stood that the latter should make no reference to the date of his son's return to Paris—for all he knew matters there had undergone no change—but should wait for the boy to announce his own plans.

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This Laddie did, abruptly enough, when his own dislike of erratic idleness brought to a head the chafe and aimlessness of the first days of mourning.

"Going to town to-day, Reverend," he remarked at breakfast, "to see my chief. I'm chucking Paris."

The Rector glanced at his son but said nothing.

"Chucking Paris! Why on earth, Ian?"

It was Christine, who now, poor soul, seeing yet another brick loosened in the edifice of the *status quo*, felt that first tremor of the unknown which was, before long, to make her as loth to leave her home as, two days ago, she had been eager.

"Why on earth . . . ?" she repeated.

"Well, dears," said Laddie quietly, "I'd rather not tell you; it may be unnecessary. If I must, I will. Mayn't we leave it at that?"

"You'll be back for dinner?" was the Rector's only comment.

The *Evening Herald* shared with several other organs a vast building between Fleet Street and the river, being, indeed, a star of merely moderate magnitude in the Drabsworthy constellation of newspapers. Laddie approached the ornate headquarters of these monuments of British culture in a spirit at once diffident and non-conciliatory. Secretly he was a little apprehensive. He had no desire to give details of what had occurred; at the same time he valued himself highly enough to hope that some explanation would be demanded. Climbing the steps to the central entrance, he criticized fiercely to himself the overloaded design of the Drabsworthy facade. Two years ago it had caused

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him a thrill of superior excitement. He was then the bright young graduate, ready to adorn with his talents and his taste the praiseworthy but uncouth world of journalism. Now he felt curiously insignificant and his insignificance sought refuge in aggressiveness both from itself and from the dread of having to defend the flight from France.

He need not have worried. In the first place his friend Trevor, through whom he had got the job originally, had been transferred to another paper. In the second place Trevor's successor was one of the very few Drabsworthy journalists, who more or less answered to the conception of that class cherished by intellectuals with a contempt for the "yellow press." Herbert Sparkes was short and stout, with a voice of brass and a cult for the ruthless. He invariably worked in shirt-sleeves for the sake of appearance, wearing three vests in winter to obviate possible chills. Even the bulldog breed cannot afford influenza. His literary attainments were those of a comic picture postcard. But he knew—or thought he knew, which came to the same thing—what the *Evening Herald* public wanted and set out to give it them; for which reason he was more of a success than poor Trevor, who was a scholar and a gentleman, despite his whimsicality and his taste for gin. Trained in the school that regards Sunday newspapers as, in intention, seven times as underbred as those that appear every day, Sparkes had an eye for paragraphs about other people's wives and a capacity for reading, with zest and understanding, any instalment of

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any feuilleton. He had only been in power for three weeks or so when Laddie's card was brought to him and his secretary was called upon for details of the visitor's activities. These occupied a few minutes; Sparkes' idea of teaching young men their place occupied a good many more. The twenty minute wait (he had announced himself by postcard—to Trevor naturally, knowing no better—two days before) brought Laddie to a point dangerously near exasperation. The initial relief, caused by the news of Trevor's disappearance, gave way to combative annoyance. "Blast the swine!" he thought. "I suppose he does this to show how grand he is!" Which, of course, was perfectly accurate.

Sparkes glared at him as he entered the room and made no remark. Uninvited, Laddie sat down, crossed his legs, arranged the crease in his trousers and decided the fellow wanted washing.

"I am rather busy," said the great man.

"I will not keep you a moment. I have come to say that I have left Paris and cannot go back there. Is there any other job available?"

Sparkes shook his head.

"There would not even have been Paris very much longer." The tone was oracular.

Laddie raised his eyebrows.

"How fortunate, then! I seem to be most opportune. Was I too rotten for anything?"

"I have not had the pleasure of reading your contributions for very long, Mr.—er—" the glance at the card was so elaborately intentional as to be

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comic—"Mr. Macallister. But I had decided in any case to exclude the feature in future."

Laddie smothered a smile ; "feature in future " amused him ; "feature in future . . . motor with mater. . . ."

"So you will be glad to see the last of me ? " he asked genially.

Sparkes frowned.

"You seem to take it very easily. Doubtless you have taken the precaution of getting the offer of what you consider a better job, and came here to play off one against the other ? "

Laddie got up. He was very angry but, not being of the type that raves, answered with quiet insolence :

"You are having fun, aren't you ? "

He was out of the room before the infuriated Sparkes found his voice. His secretary and other subordinates lost no time in regretting the discovery.

By the time he reached home Laddie had cooled into depression. He sat silent through dinner and did not broach the subject of the afternoon's events till, alone with his father in the study, he had the moral support of cigar and cognac.

"I've broken with the *Herald*," he said suddenly.

"Push and go . . . !" murmured the Rector.

"Tell me about it."

"Rub it in !" replied Laddie bitterly. "You have every right. They are slave drivers and vulgarians and I was a footling young coxcomb. No flowers by request."

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The Rector twinkled and drew quietly at his pipe.

"Can I be of any assistance?" he asked.

Laddie gave a brief resumé of the Dacre incident. He was consistently unfair to himself.

"And there we are," he concluded. "I am one of the unemployed and deserve it. For the first time I realize how utterly useless I am."

"Nonsense, boy, you're not useless a bit. This kind of crisis is inevitable. Better soon than late, that is all. Don't begin blaming me for not sending you to Leeds to learn about leather and textiles. You will appreciate Winchester and Oxford again in a few weeks."

"Possibly. But what happens now?"

"Shall I write to some of my distinguished friends? They are all rather clerical and your heathenism is notorious, however I can but try."

"You are a dear, Reverend, and you won't think it ungrateful if I have a whack on my own first?"

As he spoke the evening post was brought in. Among the letters was one to Laddie from his journey acquaintance, Dermot Gill. The writer sent condolences on the death of Mrs. Macallister and suggested an immediate visit to town as change of air and occupation. Laddie made up his mind at once, showed the letter to his father and wrote an acceptance.

"I'll look round. If I fail, as I probably shall, I shall come crawling home for help. Leave me this last shred of self-esteem!"

CHAPTER FOUR

I

NATURAL curiosity prompted Laddie, when he had accepted Dermot Gill's invitation, to make such investigation as was possible into the circumstances and family of his new acquaintance. The letter-paper was headed Belgrave Square, and this fact, in conjunction with Debrett, left little doubt that the red-haired young man was son (possibly nephew, but probably son) of Patrick, first Baron Gill, of Castle Maeve in the County of Dublin, Ireland, and of Grimmingham, Shropshire. This discovery piqued Laddie's interest, for Lord Gill was remarkable, even in an age of parvenu Napoleons.

A life spent in the devising and manufacture of that deservedly popular beverage Cuchulain Whiskey had turned Patrick Flannigan first to Mr. and then to Baron Gill, had earned a large fortune, and had created a national figure, whose reactionary ideas and lurid history were a never failing delight to eager Radicals. From that day in the middle eighties, when first gigantic hoard-

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ings in many an otherwise tedious countryside proclaimed :

CUCHULAIN

THE DRINK THAT PUT THE WHISK IN WHISKEY

—the now famous spirit grew steadily in reputation. With Cuchulain and its revenues behind him, the proprietor could afford to ignore the taunts that greeted, first his marriage, then his political conversion, and finally his accession to the peerage. His wife, Veronica, was only child and heiress of Naboth Gill, who, under a modest incognito invented and brought to every sufferer the boon of Pimpline Toilet Cream. That the impulse which prompted the careful elimination of his name from every branch of Pimpline Limited was a sensitive and creditable aversion to publicity and not contempt for his family, is proved by Naboth Gill's last testament, which bequeathed the whole of his immense fortune to his daughter, on condition that, when she married, her husband adopted her surname, either to the exclusion of or in addition to his own.

So Patrick Flannigan became Patrick Gill and a very wealthy man indeed. Inevitably he drifted into politics. His inclinations and traditions made him an ardent Nationalist and, most fortunately, the Liberals, with whom he naturally associated himself, were then in power. Already he suffered from the taunts of baser

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journalism, as when the cartoonist of the *Morning Mercury* published a drawing entitled :

THE ROAD TO GILLGAL

OR

Is Malt also amongst the Profits ?

(It must be remembered that in those days the Liberals still retained temperance as a plank in their platform.) But the turning of the tide against the Government wrought a change in Patrick Gill's opinions, and the next few years saw him first a baronet, and then a peer. It was characteristic of the man neither to cloak his (or rather his wife's) name under a high-sounding title, nor to forget that an Irishman, though he has duties to Ireland, is only certain of a seat in the Upper House if his peerage is of a more than purely Irish scope.

These salient facts in Lord Gill's history were sufficiently generally known to set Laddie puzzling over the contrast between the impulsive and charming Dermot and the antecedents ascribed to him by gossip and by books of reference. He reached the great house in Belgrave Square on the afternoon of the appointed Monday, with anticipations and questionings, keen but incoherent.

From the outset things were odd. The door was opened by a palpable charwoman in curl papers and a dirty apron. The hall was a vault, in which corpses swathed in dust-sheets spoke of dead and buried furniture. The visitor was instructed to

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take himself and his bag up to the second floor, where he would find Mr. Dermot and his own bedroom. He toiled upwards and, purposely, with considerable noise. Dermot heard him, as Laddie had hoped he would, and blundered down the stairs to greet his visitor and relieve him of his luggage. It was a relief to find, in Dermot's room, chairs unshrouded, a smell of tobacco, and a sense of habitation. An electric kettle whispered eerily. A canister, tea-cups, a cake in a box not yet unpacked, and a moderately clear space on a table heaped high with books and papers showed the imminence of tea.

Rather puzzled but genuinely glad to submit once more to the magnetic geniality of his acquaintance, Laddie lay back in a deep and splendid chair, while his host embarked on the task of preparing the meal.

It was a picturesque but sensational performance. The first spoonful of tea fell into the blue bag of sugar, the second arrived half into the teapot, half on to the table, where it pattered briskly among the papers and would inevitably make everything gritty for days. Then a cup was knocked over and broken. But a cupboard produced a substitute, a substitute, even to Laddie's amateur eye, of obvious beauty and probable value, while the inexorable Dermot swept perilously on his way. He appeared to be unmoved by scrutiny, although occasionally swearing softly to himself or glancing with bewildered amusement at his guest.

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It seemed a long while before the meal was ready, but Laddie made no sign of impatience, nor did he offer to help. He felt that each moment he was getting more surely the measure of his stranger-friend.

The room was magnificently untidy. Vast bookshelves, without being really full, had contrived to overflow on to the floor, the mantelpiece, the tables, the chairs. A desk near the window carried an enormous stamp album, heavily covered with dust, from which a distracting and matted mane of stamps hung threateningly in every direction. On the floor under the table were a pair of philatelic forceps, a pipe, and one boxing glove. Newspapers were everywhere. On the walls were many pictures, all crooked and all dusty. They were as varied as the other objects in the room. A Turner water-colour and two fine Rembrandt etchings lolled squalidly among school and college groups, a photograph of Gladstone, another of Parnell, some vile sketches of moors and sea, and numerous reproductions of classical and mediæval art.

The furniture, such of it as was visible, was expensive and comfortable but stained and dirty. On the polished table-top were rings where hot vessels had been stood (the teapot was, this very moment, making a fine addition to the collection); the leather chair-covers were ink-stained in some places and cut with a knife in others; the fine rugs on the floor were blotched with grease and (especially the one before the fireplace) burnt

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generously with coals, matches, or cigarette ends. Tobacco ash littered everything. On an immense crimson-velvet cushion with tarnished gold tassels, which lay on the floor by one of the windows, a large and somnolent cat purred happily. It was a tabby cat, short coated and beautifully barred with black and grey.

So much did Laddie's preliminary survey absorb. He addressed himself to the not irreproachable tea with zest and pleasure. Things promised well, but he hoped his bedroom would be cleaner. There might be anything in some of the dark corners of this amazing room.

Dermot seemed to divine his thoughts.

"I'm afraid this place is very filthy. I hate having things tidied up; I never can find anything. My people are in Ireland. But they never try to keep this room decent; its no use. Still, you'll find your bedroom all right, I hope."

He went on, speaking with his mouth full:

"I hope, too, you don't mind coming to a shut-up house? I'm hardly ever here when my people are. We argue so. You see I'm a Radical and a Home Ruler and so on, and of course my father is high Tory. My brother is his joy. Not that we have rows, you know, only it's jollier for everyone if we live separate. If I'm going to work in London I shall settle somewhere by myself. Some more tea? Oh! *I am* sorry—has it gone over you? How dreadfully careless!

Laddie wiped his trousers more or less clean and laughed happily.

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"It's perfectly all right. But tell me—if I'm too curious you can shut me up—what are you going to do?"

"Well—I shall do some political work in the East End, and lecture for the W.E.A. and help the party at elections and so on. What are you going to do?"

"I'm in rather a hole," replied Laddie, and gave a rough outline of his position

"Would you care to work under Postlethwaite?" asked Dermot. "I know he wants someone."

"I shouldn't think he'd have me." Laddie's heart gave a leap of excitement.

Postlethwaite was the editor of a famous weekly, and talked of with respectful dislike, even in Jingo circles.

"We'll ask him."

Dermot rose, and the tea-table swayed dangerously. Crossing the room he disinterred a telephone from a pile of overcoats and hats and throatily demanded a number. In a few minutes the conversation was over.

"To-morrow at three. I'll go with you. How fortunate if it turns out well! I'm so glad I thought of it!"

And his round, red face beamed with genuine delight.

The two chattered on as if they had known each other all their lives.

When Laddie went to bed that night he had grasped the essentials of his new friend's life, and consequently some explanation of the odd mixture

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of splendour and squalor with which he himself was being entertained. For both elements were strikingly present. He need not have dreaded a dirty bedroom. It was sumptuous; its private bathroom radiated cleanliness; its electric lights, its telephone, its receptacles for clothes, books, boots, hats, and hair-combings were bewildering in their subtlety. It was, it is true, more the bedroom of a Fifth Avenue hotel than that of a private house in London, but, as the former were designed for just such visitors as the owner of this London house, the similarity had more logic than might at first have been supposed.

The staffing of the mansion was inexplicable. At least one man servant and two maids appeared during the evening. Why they had not been visible in the afternoon was a mystery as dark as that of their appearance later. Equally odd was the house's inability to produce dinner (Dermot had taken his guest to a very uncomfortable and democratic club in a comparative slum behind Bond Street, where they had consumed tepid fish and liver and bacon and bad coffee and met fourteen Syndicalists and a Labour Member), hand in hand with which strangeness went a slight uneasiness about breakfast next morning.

How curiously typical of the man Lord Gill undoubtedly was, to treat his recalcitrant second son with a blend of violence and indulgence, to give him unlimited money and at the same time to make it practically impossible for the two to live under the same roof! Laddie pictured the argu-

ments, fencings with words, insinuations, then the flash of quarrel and all the old man's coarse and brutal nature forcing its way through the veneer of suavity which became the most Conservative member of the House of Lords. The elder brother doubtless made matters worse. Dermot had sketched him ; rather stout, newly married, " disgustingly rich " (strange words from Dermot, but the actual ones) ; an ordinary " climber " no doubt, thought Laddie, buying his way from rung to rung of the ladder he had chosen to assail.

In such a brood Dermot must indeed be thought an ugly duckling. The parental attitude was so obvious, so inevitable. Enthusiasm is middle-class, wherefore be languid even in well-doing ; the democratic pose is smart enough but " we aristocrats must hang together." Despite the slightness of the acquaintance, Laddie felt he already loved the impulse, the clumsiness, the irrepressible, ridiculous optimism of this millionaire Radical, who had flopped so suddenly into his life. It was good to think that he had first appeared, hung about with bags, jammed in the door of a French railway carriage. It would always be good to remember that, from the first moment, he had seen the real Dermot, not the starched and mannered caricature of the true man that so often does duty for the chance encounters of life. " I was fairly natural myself, too," thought Laddie with self-accusing satisfaction. " The gruelling that sleepless night and the Reverend's telegram had given

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me had, I suppose, knocked more stuffing out of me than I realized. Anyway, I never remember feeling less anxious about my choice of words."

The all-important question of the morrow's interview with Postlethwaite did not trouble him. He had, with all his self-consciousness and nerves, a restful streak of fatalism in his nature which always spared him worry over the inevitable. He trusted vaguely to Providence to tell him what to say and how to behave.

As he turned over in the dark, a muffled crash from next door told him that his host was still destructively awake and engaged on the complicated task of threading his way through the perils of yet another evening's occupation.

II

Some people considered the *Vanguard* the greatest liberal paper in the world. It had seldom been Liberal with a capital L ; its staff was small ; its circulation modest. But its influence was great and, with the decadence of the Liberal daily press, its importance had increased out of all proportion to its apparent size.

Not his bitterest enemies denied to Esau Postlethwaite a share of the credit in having won for his paper its faithful and discerning public. It had always been his ambition to edit the *Vanguard*,

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and unique good fortune won him the coveted distinction. He was "remembered" when his party returned to power. That this remarkable case of political gratitude ever occurred at all was startling enough. It became wholly incomprehensible when one recalled the bitter loyalty with which Postlethwaite served his ideals through their dreary days of unpopularity. During the Boer War he faced loneliness and insult. He pressed no claim on his official chiefs. He merely fought his humble battle by their side.

In any case, his ambition realized, Postlethwaite found himself, not only in a position of inherent influence and power, but without hampering pledges to observe or benefactor's scruples to respect. He was his own and the *Vanguard's* master. But his autocracy was never tyranny and his paper, with its courageous dignity and fine discrimination of what was vital in the new ideas, convinced many a reader in a distant land of the ultimate nobility of the path along which it pointed the way.

Vanguard House, the headquarters of the paper, had a character in externals which, like its editor, compelled attention. It was a tall, mellow, Georgian house in Golden Square with slender balconies and tiers of simple, well-proportioned windows. A plain brass plate bore the paper's name. No letters sprawled across the façade of this faded but unbending house. One by one its contemporaries and neighbours were torn down and replaced by towering office blocks. Vanguard

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House remained impregnable, to all appearance never changing.

Within, however, it was a hive of industry and modern competence. Postlethwaite was not the man to affect contempt for telephones, lifts, and the hundred less widespread American contrivances for "speeding-up." There is a story that the owner of the paper once commented on the apparent inconsistency between the mouldering conservatism of the house without and its gleaming, breathless modernity within.

"Sir Charles," Postlethwaite replied, "I am here to encourage what is best in English thought and life. When I look at the offices that modern architects erect to-day, I know that Vanguard House is much more beautiful than anything they can put in its place. But when I study the office methods of old-fashioned English business houses, I see them to be cumbrous, torpid and inefficient. America can teach me better, and from America I have learnt."

At the time when Laddie Macallister came to London and stayed with Dermot Gill, the political world was principally exercised over the question of Home Rule for Ireland. Naturally the *Vanguard* was Nationalist to the veriest office-boy. Irish members were continually in and out of the editor's room; the telephones rang ceaselessly. Postlethwaite throughout the year had been pouring, with skilfully graduated vehemence, the torrent of his inexhaustible invective on the heads

of the Opposition. At first his attack was general ; gradually he concentrated on a group ; gradually again on individuals. Few experiences were so much dreaded—and rightly—as personal assault in the pages of the *Vanguard*. Postlethwaite held the eternal trump of his own notorious sincerity. There were few men in politics on either side whose pasts would bear comparison with his. Impregnable, therefore, in the armour of his honesty (it had cost him torment, misery, and even danger to beat, temper, and join the steel of it), Postlethwaite, from his grave, long-windowed room overlooking Golden Square, hurled each week the shafts of his invective.

Lord Gill had been for several years a favourite target. He combined all the qualities that Postlethwaite most disliked. He was self-made, he was an *arriviste* socially and politically, he had sold his country for a title, his soul for a spurious gentility.

But Gill was not important enough to go to the stake, except as a stop-gap, in that crowded market-place of the *Vanguard's* pages. In times like the present a profusion of greater victims were available and he was left in comparative peace. Probably his immunity or otherwise made less difference to him than to most others, as he never read the paper and his success was by now beyond the reach of outside influence. But Postlethwaite's hostility is important to recognize, in so far as it explains his acquaintance with Dermot. Philippes Egalités are always welcome, and Dermot was a

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very genuine and simple-minded renegade. His telephone call, therefore, evoked a prompt appointment, and when, at three o'clock, he and Laddie sent in their cards to the *Vanguard's* editor they were shown upstairs without undue delay.

Esau Postlethwaite was not an old man, as old men go nowadays, but his appearance suggested, if not ripe years, at least a frailty and feebleness of which many an aged man would be resentfully ashamed. His tiny body was bent, his few hairs white as snow.

He made no attempt to rise as his visitors entered the room, but his solemn, wizened face lightened to something approaching a smile, for Dermot was a favourite.

"Come in, my boy! Glad to see you."

The cordiality of the words tempered, though they could not conquer, the harsh reverberance of the speaker's voice.

"Good afternoon, Mr. Postlethwaite. This is my friend Macallister—I spoke about him yesterday on the telephone. I knew you were in need of someone else—and he was looking for a job, and I wondered——"

His voice lost itself in the mists of the speaker's confused stammer.

Postlethwaite's eyes had frozen into their usual glittering immobility. He studied Laddie with embarrassing thoroughness.

"Scotch, I suppose," he rapped out. "Hope you're not a Presbyterian. I hate Scotchmen at all times, but especially when they are also Presby-

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terians. What sort of a job are you looking for ? ”

Inwardly terrified, but outwardly almost languid in his calmness, Laddie replied :

“ My Scotch name is one of my private griefs. There seems no way of getting rid of it. My father is a Canon of Chester. For two years I have done pictures and books and things in a Paris letter to the *Evening Herald*. But there are reasons why I can't go on, so I shall be grateful for any job I can get within my curiously valueless capacities.”

“ *Evening Herald* ! ” grunted Postlethwaite. “ I don't blame you for leaving them. I suppose their attitude on the liquor question disgusted you—or was it Ireland ? ”

Laddie laughed a little.

“ Indeed, no—I'm afraid I'm no politician at all—nothing so actual.”

Postlethwaite turned to Dermot.

“ What am I to do for your non-political friend ? ” His voice had a sneering quality that, for a moment, made Laddie hate him.

“ He's awfully good at languages—and—and—knowing what's good—and—— ”

“ And languages again, I suppose,” barked the editor. “ Like the mutton for lunch.”

He was silent for a moment, gazing fixedly at Laddie, who was now acutely miserable. Suddenly he spoke again :

“ I have no sub-editors or managers in my office. Only secretaries. I have my financial secretary,

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and my parliamentary secretary, and my economics secretary and my foreign affairs secretary. Just like a Cabinet. I am Prime Minister. I have had to sack my literary secretary for making love to his typist during office hours. He forgot that his time in this office belonged to his employer and not to his passions. If you feel able to confine your private affairs to your free time, you can take his place. Salary: two hundred as a start. Please realize finally that I am chief, even of the reviewing department. Do you accept?"

"Of course," said Laddie calmly. "I am much obliged to you. When shall I begin?"

"Well, you'll have to give the *Evening Herald* blackguards some notice, I suppose. I've got plenty to fill the paper during the summer. Come in on the first of September. Good morning."

And he rang a bell at his side for a boy to show them out.

In the street Laddie took Dermot's arm. He was very excited.

"It's too good to be true. You didn't mind my not telling him I'd seen the *Herald* people? It would only have spoiled his curtain. . . . You're a wonder, Gill. What can I say to thank you?"

But Dermot was horribly embarrassed at the prospect of gratitude and collided with a lamp-post. The damage repaired, he remembered an appointment at the Fabian Society bookshop and, mumbling that he would be at Bond's at seven-thirty for dinner, blundered away.

III

Bond's was nearly empty. It was a hot evening, and this strangely loved and hated chop-house had fewer charms on hot evenings than at any other time. Laddie had to sit nearly ten minutes on a hard and narrow plush-covered bench before Dermot's rusty shapelessness surged into view. This ten minutes he spent in counting the flies on the sugar basin in the corner, in wondering why in the world Dermot had appointed this amazing tavern as rendezvous, and, for the first time since he left it, in genuine longing for the quivering dapple of leaves, for the heady, musical dusk of summer Paris. For he was, as yet, only the seed-bed of London love. He hardly knew he could, and certainly knew he never had regarded his native capital as anything but a paradise for wet weeks in winter, as a vulgar, tawdry, stupid sprawl of bungled opportunities and selfish, rotten individualism. So that his heresy with regard to Bond's was, at least, comprehensible. Besides, he had made himself hot and agitated in trying to find the place, and when a man scorns to ask his way and pursues, with an elaborate pretence of not being at a loss at all, a restaurant of which he has conceived a wholly false external impression, difficulty and spiritual stress are unavoidably his. And so Laddie sat and counted flies and longed for

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Paris and sweated, but this last gently and opaquely, as a gentleman should.

Dermot, democrat and Irishman, was beady and unashamed. He had apparently been living the life of the people, as his tie was disordered and a large damp patch on his waistcoat smelt strongly of whiskey. He was apologetic and, as ever, charmed away every grievance by his inimitable personality. Even his order of steak and onions passed without protest.

As they gorged, they talked of Postlethwaite, the *Vanguard*, and the "job."

"I have my misgivings," said Laddie. "It sounds a tremendous thing to be, doesn't it? Rather a step from a footling little column in the *Evening Herald* to a 'literary secretaryship' on the *Vanguard*!"

"Don't expect too much," cautioned Dermot. "Postlethwaite has no use for books except as paper politics, and he'll keep you in close harness, I expect. He may put you on to interviews or foreign newspaper comment. You'll get no 'literature' in the art and margin sense in Vanguard House."

And the tone of voice showed that the speaker shared the editor's contempt for authors who were not also men of politics.

The friends walked slowly back to Belgrave Square.

"I must go home to-morrow," said Laddie.

"Rot! Stay a bit longer. Tell me about the row with the *Herald* people?"

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Laddie gave details and again hoped it would not matter not having told Postlethwaite.

"That fat man was the limit," he concluded.

Dermot took breath and embarked on an indictment of the Drabsworthy newspaper trust and its evil ways. He would not have stopped talking till bed-time, had not a new edition of the *Westminster Gazette* been thrust violently in his face by a news-boy. In the ensuing excavation of a penny he paused to take breath and Laddie lost himself gladly in the throng of his new impressions.

"I am beginning to wonder whether this place is not more beautiful than Paris," he muttered.

The night was bronze with dust and reflected light. In the roadway motor-buses blustered to and fro. An occasional private car purred stealthily through the jungle of baser traffic. Crowds swayed slowly through the Park gates, while beyond their restless, murmuring mass, the great trees slumbered motionless. The air was filmed with dust; hot odours of petrol vied with noise and uneasy, inarticulate humanity for mastery of the senses. The town had no serenity, no happiness; only gaudy streaks of ugly laughter painted across a dim background of restlessness and licence.

Why was it beautiful? Laddie wondered with all his might. He recalled the cool peace of the boulevards. He even recalled the track of the water-cart, his last evening in Paris. Why did he no longer sigh for that gracious, cultured city? In a flash it came to him, for he loved with reason as he hated with reason. He hated Paris because

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her street-life was a lie. The souls of cities are not in the crowds that throng their avenues, in the promenaders that line their parks and streets, but behind the shutters and blinds of their houses. He remembered the sour tiers of Paris windows ; the walls were shells of rottenness. Even the cabs and omnibuses carried decay, deceit, foulness. London kept her soul within doors and it was a good, clean soul, stupid a little, perhaps narrow, but in its slow quiet way a soul of honesty and wonder. He caught at the final word with joy. "Wonder"; that was it ! There was no wonder in Paris ; everything was old, tired, threadbare. He spoke aloud, for very relief :

"They have not discovered everything here. They can still be children."

And Dermot, glancing mistily up from the report of an important political speech that absorbed him, murmured :

"Monstrous. But the party will soon put an end to that. Vandeleur has got the dressing down he deserved from Bob Stilts."

And he sank back into the soothing depths of Labour sarcasm.

At the door of the Gill mansion Laddie stopped and surveyed the bunchy foliage in the central garden, the generous spaces of roadway, the vast, self-satisfied, mostly shuttered houses.

"This is not really it," he muttered. "Only the sky is it."

"You talk too much to yourself," commented Dermot. "What's the matter ?"

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"I was hoping I should not have to live in Belgrave Square, a sincere though, under the circumstances, an offensive and unnecessary aspiration. But, really, where shall I live?"

Dermot seemed to have a solution for every difficulty and to produce it with placid lack of emotion.

"Will you live with me?"

"Not here?"—in alarm.

"No, my dear fool, certainly not! Do you suppose I could endure this lousy den of parasites? I told you I would live alone somewhere. It has just occurred to me that you will want digs and I shall like your company. How about it?"

"You're a most extraordinary person. My future seems to fall in chunks from your hands and all I have to do is to tread it down into a path. Of course I should love it. Have you decided where?"

"Well—as a matter of fact—yes." Dermot was almost apologetic. "But I don't know if you'd care for it. You see, there's an old—a kind of old—well, sort of old thing I'm sorry for, who has fallen on evil days and could let me a maisonette—and I'd thought of helping her. But, as I say, you may hate it. It's rather far off and shabby and that kind of thing——"

But Laddie, with a fierce instinct, knew he would not hate it and said so.

"Where is it—and what's its name?"

"You'll never know either it or its name. It's

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in far, far distant Bayswater and its name is Magdala Houses."

"Magdala Houses . . ." repeated Laddie softly. "Magdala Houses. . . . A magical name, and tremendous. I shall adore Magdala Houses. Can we go and see it to-morrow?"

"I thought you were going home to-morrow?"

"Not if it interferes with house-hunting. But," he paused awkwardly, "I'm an ignoramus about London. Will it be very expensive? Because I couldn't——"

Dermot turned on him almost fiercely.

"Don't be a damned idiot! Do you conceive my levying rent off you, when I fairly stink with money! Besides the old geezer is my protégée not yours. Ridiculous . . ."

He stumbled upstairs, still grumbling angrily.

Laddie said nothing. "What a dear old thing he is!" he thought. "As if I could accept such a proposition! Still, we can arrange that later."

IV

Anyone who cuts westward from Belgrave Square through the slightly uneasy but still undismayed splendours of Belgravia, comes very soon into the track of a bus that runs from Victoria to Cricklewood. On the top of this bus, in a peevish, dusty wind and under a cross, grey sky, Dermot and Laddie were tossed and rumbled northwards. The

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weather had changed suddenly in the night ; it was cold, but the chill was untempered by rain ; Laddie wore a greatcoat of Lord Gill's, a large and opulent great coat that Dermot mocked. He was left in peace to absorb the view, Dermot being sunk in the second of the three morning papers he had brought away with him, and speaking no word. The bus swung past the block of ancient houses at the corner of Church Street into the turmoil of Notting Hill Gate ; then chose a road, apparently haphazard, and lurched northwards once again.

Dermot, who was never punctual but always just in time, woke suddenly, prodded his companion and stumbled off the bus. Laddie followed him along sad, untidy streets of disillusioned houses, past pseudo-classical chapels and pseudo-ecclesiastical taverns, till the grey mass of a church loomed above their heads. Indeed all the buildings seemed suddenly to loom, top-heavy, tragical.

"Here we are," said Dermot huskily.

And glancing upward, high on a dingy wall, Laddie descried an iron plate and on the plate the words

MAGDALA HOUSES, W.

It was hardly a street at all. Rather, a truncated stump of roadway that barely started on its career, before it ended abruptly in a crazy iron paling, separated by a strip of wretched grass from a blank wall. On either side of this blighted road rose dark and towering houses, four on one side,

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five on the other. The angry greyness of the sky seemed infinitely distant. Greedily Laddie was registering the tiers of paintless windows, the heavy porches with their steep flights of steps, the blotched discoloration of the plastered walls, when Dermot, anxiously rather, repeated :

"Here we are."

He watched his guest nervously.

"I'm afraid——" he began.

"It's immense ! I dreamed of this."

And the ecstatic interruption smoothed the lines of uncertainty from Dermot's kindly face. He walked up the steps of the nearest of the four houses and rang the bell.

For a long time there was no response. Both Dermot and Laddie stood very silent, the former near the house-door, the latter about half-way up the steps that led to it. They listened intently. Every now and then, an unreal, spasmodic stirring could be heard somewhere in the house, but still no one appeared. Dermot rang again. The deep voice of the bell, far away in the basement, tolled sadly, hopelessly. The street was oddly still. Not a sign of life in any of the houses opposite. Except for one that was to let, all had curtains in the windows, but they might have been as empty as their sombre blind-eyed fellow for all the movement or vitality they showed. There was not even a cat prowling in an area, not even a sparrow pecking at crumbs on the gloomy strip of tattered grass behind the iron fence.

The sudden opening of the front door echoed like

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a sharp report in the stillness. It opened slowly and not very wide. In the opening a tiny and aged woman peered at the visitors. Ever afterwards this first glimpse of poor Miss Grogan, peeping half-timid and half-dazed from the yawning blackness of her vast and crumbling house, was to Laddie the epitome of mile upon mile of London. In certain quarters are acres of houses (few so large as Miss Grogan's, but none so small that they cannot be considered houses, and not cottages) every one discreetly curtained, every one poverty-stricken and colourless, and every one hiding some pathetic or secret life. An occasional tradesman clatters in the basement. Sometimes a maid-servant, in shabby smartness, hurries out and away, looking neither to right nor left, only anxious to leave the blighted, soundless street in which her mistress lives and to thrill for a few brief hours amid the clangour of tramcars and the stir of shops and moving crowds. But of the actual occupiers not a sign. Only by importunity, by ceaseless ringing, can the door be coaxed an inch or two ajar. And then, in the darkness of the passage way, old and questioning eyes will blink unhappily in the daylight and a querulous or faded voice will ask the stranger's business.

There can be no doubt that Miss Grogan would have followed the routine to the end, had not Dermot prevented her. He greeted her warmly by name, introduced Laddie and announced why they had come in one breathless and incoherent sentence. Because she understood or because she

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could not help it, Miss Grogan admitted her visitors to the hall. It was grimy and had a sour smell of dust and ancient varnish. The walls were covered with marbled paper, once cream and glazed, now dirty-brown and dull; under a rounded arch, bracketed with plaster to the walls, the stairs rose into obscurity. Preceded by the old woman, the friends went slowly upwards.

"Maisonette," that worst of words and, from the landlord's point of view, happiest of inventions, had acquired a special meaning in Laddie's mind which was not fulfilled by the upper part of Miss Grogan's house. Indeed "upper part"—baldly and without elaboration—was the best word for it. It knew nothing of separate offices. It had no property front-door, clinging unrecessed and foolish to the very edge of the bottom stair of an upper flight. Dermot's plan was to take, as sort of permanent lodgings, Miss Grogan's three top floors (there were floors enough in that gaunt house) and leave her to cook, cater, and decay in the lower half of the building.

Considering how large a part philanthropy played in the scheme, it would have been unjust, ungrateful and useless to dwell on practical disadvantages. Laddie realized this and, seeing with relief that the rooms were of a good size and airy, dismissed from his mind the penalty of stairs imposed for forgetting one's handkerchief, the probable fortunes of meals on that long journey from the murky dungeon of the basement, the ineradicable horror of the mantelpieces with which

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each single chamber was adorned. He emitted appreciative noises when necessary, left Dermot to make arrangements of dates, decorations, and furniture, and hoped Miss Grogan comprehended her tenant's wishes more clearly than seemed likely.

In the street Dermot turned anxiously to his companion :

"I hope you really like it? Of course we'll paint it up. Poor Bridget Grogan, she's had a dreadful time. Her father left her with nothing—and that barrack of a house. He was an Irishman, you know——. What? Oh, the name—yes, I suppose it's obvious. What he did with his money I'm not sure. He had quite a successful tradesman's career in Ireland. I believe he was swindled abominably by the English—he trusted them, you see. Anyway the money went. I believe he actually built all those houses. Why, God knows. They belong more or less to Miss Grogan, but cost her more in repairs than she ever gets by rent, let alone the mortgages. It's a dead neighbourhood. I am afraid you'll find it very dull and distant——?"

"It's just exactly what I wanted, my dear man; honestly. The district is a jungle of mystery and possibilities."

He wished he could claim a voice in the wall-papers, but his footing in the matter was, to say the least of it, unofficial. He contrived to bring the conversation round to interior decoration and urged some general views on Dermot, who agreed

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vaguely. It would be exciting to see what he made of it.

In the afternoon Laddie went home again. A curious lassitude had come over him; they had been strenuous days. He faced the prospect of a chaotic summer of house-hunting in the north and of clearing up at home with a feeling of irritable helplessness.

V

"You are not very communicative," complained Christine.

"My dear girl!" her brother expostulated, "I have told you all about the *Vanguard* and Postlethwaite and Dermot. What more do you want?"

"Not *all* about Dermot," she contradicted with her gentle smile. "I haven't got hold of him. And nothing whatever about what's-his-name houses, where you're going to live."

Laddie stroked his bull-terrier thoughtfully and gazed over the garden.

"No," he said at last, "for that is London. Perhaps when I know her better. . . ."

Christine looked at him puzzled. She had not a mocking nature and, for all her Englishry, did not deride what she did not understand. Perhaps, being a woman and fond of her brother, she felt sympathy for a romantic secret. In any case she made no remark and lay back in her chair with peaceful eyes.

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As it was not very warm, they had chosen a spot sheltered from that same ill-mannered wind that had belaboured Laddie and Dermot on their Cricklewood bus only the day before. There was still no sign of rain; indeed the clouds were partially broken in the west and the fine weather seemed inclined to return. The drought was getting wearisome to gardeners, and Christine saw with sadness the pink greyness of the caking soil; she hated watering. The thought reminded her of the coming departure. After first welcoming the change, she was now in full reaction and all her quiet and settled nature shrank from the upheaval. Almost she hoped no house would be found. When she spoke again it was rather wistfully.

"When are you and father going north?"

"In about three days, I think."

Again silence. Christine sighed. Laddie turned his soft, brown eyes on his sister:

"Poor old Christine. It's beastly, isn't it?"

Her very immobility was answer. Her eyes roved over the close, fine grass, the great cedars, the glimpse of tall, red wall and fruit trees. She had never known any other home but this; never really known, that is. She was only seven when her father had taken this living, and for all that psychologists set the most receptive period of the child mind before that age, her earlier memories were queer, disconnected distresses, a small child's half-understood pity for tired parents, half-realized hatred of the squalor, drunkenness, and poverty

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around her. To all intent she had grown up at Stansfield St. Mary; her schooling had been slight, but, for one of her nature, probably sufficient. She was born to help and comfort rather than to lead or originate. To Christine, as to no one else, her mother had revealed, behind the mask of harsh endurance, the pitiful and sickly thing that was herself. To support that tragic prisoner had been the daughter's task, and patiently and peacefully she had performed it.

This garden was the setting of the struggle, and she loved it. It was her world. And now she was to leave it. The wrench was not self-pity. The regret was for those hidden tragedies that come the way of every duty-doing parish priest. Christine pondered with dismay the fate of struggling gentlewomen, of forlorn morsels of child-wreckage, scattered about Stansfield in obscure corners of loneliness and shame. What would become of them? Who would come to help them in their fight with poverty? Who would champion their uselessness before the world?

And again she sighed.

Laddie saw a need for optimism. He began a game with the dog, a never-failing game of tug-of-war. Moses, all his feet firmly planted on the gravel, the stick ground between his splendid teeth, tossed his head and snarled ferociously. Laddie excited him with taunts. The disturbance roused Christine, and her slow, sweet smile flowed gently back into her face. In a few minutes brother and sister were talking eagerly of the

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future and the game faded quickly to an end. It had served its purpose, but Moses, who could not realize so unflattering a fact, flopped sadly to the ground, his head upon his paws, his little eyes, absorbing patiently a world that scrupled not to use bull-terriers' happiness for its own illogical and foolish purposes.

CHAPTER FIVE

I

IT had indeed been a summer of changes, so numerous and so rapid in their succession that each individual importance had blended and been dwarfed. Lying in bed on the last night of August, Laddie felt the obsession of the past, of the present, and of the future struggling in his mind for mastery. All the evening the present had dominated. Every action, every familiar sight had the melancholy beauty of finality. It was the last night he would ever spend in the rectory of Stansfield St. Mary. Although he had not been born there, this house had become, the more frequently he was away from it, the more utterly his vision of home. The sadness of the occasion would have annoyed him two years ago. The intelligent young man just down from Oxford has ridicule for every emotion, and what emotion could be more trite than love of the old home? Two years ago a hundred melodramas would have sprung ludicrously, delightfully to mind, a hundred scenes of tawdry sentiment from the pictures and novels which, to clever youth, are an inexhaustible mine of scorn and mockery. Two years ago he

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would have perished rather than admit a twinge at the dinner-gong, sounding for the last time, a mingled desire to hear and dread of hearing Christine, after the meal, make the remark she seemed to have made every evening for ten years at least :

" Ian dear, please fill up the flower-vases on your side for me. They do drink such a lot."

But when, in its turn, the final gathering in the famous Gothic study came under his review, Laddie, in justice to himself, believed that his tears, two years ago and under similar circumstances, would not have been very far away. It had been horrible. Even the Rector (more accurately the Canon-elect) had almost succumbed to the feeling of compulsory flippancy which had them all by the throat. Hatefully, they had revived their ancient quarrels with the house they were to leave, had invented new ones even. Hatefully they had praised the moors to each other ; again and yet again Laddie or his father had claimed—insincerely, miserably enough—this or that advantage for the house that had been found.

" Curious," thought Laddie, " that they should all have been so gloomy. They have a month or more here yet."

Then it suddenly occurred to him that, not only would his father and sister be here at least a month, but London was not twenty miles away.

" What a rotter I am ! " he thought savagely. " I shall come home for week-ends ! "

These bubble-prickings, these self-inflicted mo-

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ments of emotional bathos never lost either their pleasure or their pain. It was a joy to Laddie to detect himself as a maker of surface-music ; it was a grief to find that harmonies, once seemingly woven of deep and righteous sorrow, were but the tinklings of a thoughtless mind. And so now. The misery of the past evening had been real enough ; the lump in his throat had been real enough. But to what purpose ? In ten days' time he would probably be here again ; in this very room ; sleeping as he had slept for years surrounded by the varied relics of a youth of ever-changing tastes and enthusiasms. In disgust he dismissed the present from his mind.

The future had terrors that were at least pregnant with reality. By nature a creature of habit and quiet routine, he resented all the hesitations and pitfalls of a new beginning. He had no illusions about this. He did not claim to be adventurous ; he was rather proud of being ordinary in his manner of living. But this pride went hand in hand with an extreme intellectual exclusiveness, a snobbery of which he was equally proud and equally conscious.

And this is not to say that he claimed for himself genius or even great originality. It was no effort to him to like some things that other people did not like ; his tastes were utterly instinctive and he never thought to strive after loneliness of attitude. Perhaps his bent for self-dissection was partially responsible. At Oxford and in Paris he had challenged enthusiasms, as, one after another,

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they invaded his eager and receptive mind. Some he had found to have no basis but the gregarious and he had dismissed them. Others, though shared with ten million human beings, were real and he had kept them. But none had proved to be deliberately "new." This was one of the few affectations that he would never admit, even to himself, to have practised.

And therefore adventurous, or at least ready to be so, in things of the mind, he was content with quietude and obscurity in things of the body. But this, as he liked to think, was ever denied him. Oxford, after a period, first of tortured shyness, then of uncertainty, had barely become a delight when he had had to leave it. Paris had meant the terrifying process of finding a level—all over again. Paris had become a familiar home and then the Dacre incident, followed by his mother's death, had brought it to an end and sent him wandering once more. Now the *Vanguard* office and life in London faced him with their endless possibilities of embarrassment and failure. To make matters worse, even his home was changing. The soothing and personal background of Stansfield St. Mary, into which, hitherto, he had always been able to retreat when the stresses of things and people he did not know became too wearing to be borne, was to be blotted out. What would come in its place? What would that home be like, far away in the north, so far that he could not visit it except at intervals of weeks? Finally—and the loss in this connection seemed to complete the regrets and

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self-reproaches of the early summer—his mother was dead. He told himself that even a new home would not have mattered if his mother had been there. But she was gone. Everything he knew had gone. The future was uncertainty and darkness.

Not entirely. There was his father and there was Dermot. The thought of Dermot was curiously comforting. "There must," said Laddie to himself, "be something of the woman either in him or in me, to make me like him as I do." But gloom came over him again. Dermot and Magdala Houses were only for evenings, only for intervals of freedom. The bulk of the new life was to be spent in Golden Square, in a big office full of typists who would laugh at him, of clerks who would be insolent. He had no experience of office work. Beyond a vague conception of the business man as a type, he could not visualize the dwellers in this vast and self-sufficient world. Yet there would be nothing else. Only business men and politicians. Postlethwaite was neither, it was true. But Postlethwaite was more frightening than all the others put together.

One after another, this vague and foolish band of bugbears loomed, tramped across the proscenium of his mind, and vanished. Endlessly recurrent, they were a stage crowd of nightmare bogies and their awfulness grew with the fever of sleeplessness, till the victim of their menaces at last dozed off from utter weariness.

No one was more fully aware of the stupidity

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of these flimsy imaginings than Laddie himself. Ever since he had grown up, the terror of new surroundings and of new people had been at once real and fanciful. Time and again events had proved the falseness of nervous foreboding. Each new world had shown itself, in one way or another, kindly, stimulating, delightful. But the anticipation never grew less frightening. He was apt to pity himself sometimes for the incredulity with which his shyness was received.

"You think because I don't burble and go blue in the face and upset things, I'm not shy at all," he had told Christine one day, when she had added her gentle protest to a severe maternal rebuke for refusing an invitation of some kind.

"Well, Ian, you always seem to recover very quickly, that's all I can say."

At which he had snorted, although he realized afterwards that what she had said was true, and that his preconceptions of embarrassment certainly had a way of dissolving into present enjoyment when the ordeal was actually upon him. Because, however, everyone has lessons that are always being learnt and always being forgotten, the morning of departure for London found him tired and nervous, with a feeling that his body finished off altogether below the arms and did not begin again until the knees.

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Despite the fact that the ordeal of Vanguard House was still many hours distant, the gloom of

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its imminence hung over the dusty turmoil of the first afternoon at Magdala Houses. Laddie arrived about midday and by one o'clock could sit, hot and despairing, on a packing-case of books in the middle of Miss Grogan's second-floor front. Of Dermot there was no sign. He did not appear to have been near the place all the summer, contenting himself with hurling a company of decorators, luxuriously equipped but inadequately disciplined, against the grime and blatancy of faded mid-Victorian rooms.

Laddie had not been without misgiving as to Dermot's probable adventures in decoration. There had been two alternatives. Either the dear thing's pre-natal commonness would tend to ruthless periodization, or he would embark on "artistic simplicity" which, to him, must inevitably mean brown paper walls and green paint. The actual result was so confused as to suggest that the paper of instructions had been either lost or illegible.

According to the distribution of rooms vaguely agreed upon, meals would be taken jointly on the ground floor (lent by Miss Grogan to save herself carrying and her lodgers indigestion). First floor—Dermot; sitting-room in front, bedroom and bathroom behind. Second floor—Laddie—ditto ditto. Third floor—one large room from front to back, to contain a piano, a lecturing-desk, and any other aids to culture that might be thought of later. This room would be utilized for meetings, parties, theatricals, or—in the case of illness—quarantine. Moses (on wet days) would there

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take exercise. Deirdre (Dermot's cat) would make the room a nursery for recurrent kittens.

His tour of inspection over, Laddie consumed a poorish lunch and began to unpack. Dermot had bought more furniture than would have been considered possible. Most was ugly, but all was comfortable. Also there were lots of book-cases. Hard work till tea-time broke the back of Laddie's "settling in." He was smoking gently on a sofa when the noise of a car announced his companion's arrival. In the room below the tide of his presence could be heard breaking destructively over the furniture.

Comparative peace followed dinner. The two sat in Dermot's room (as Laddie had intended, the first and not the second floor became the public sitting-room) and talked. They described their summer occupations.

"Yes—we found a house at last. A curious fluke really—we cut over the hills to save a train journey round and stopped for tea at a village called Stonecliffe. The old body was talkative and spoke of 'the Old Hall' with such affectionate contempt as to give it a sound of much promise. We inspected it and, with care, it should be jolly. Very ruinous at present. The owners can't afford to go on living there."

Some instinct told Laddie that architectural details and future enthusiasms would be wasted on present company. He switched, therefore, to the more human element and described their garrulous landlady.

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"Such a dear! Plump and rosy—absolutely the conventional Dickens type——" Then, maliciously, "essentially English."

Dermot gave no sign, but continued to singe his hair with the end of his cigar, while he lay, legs outstretched, glooming at the fire. Laddie went on:

"She must have been an old servant or something of the kind in the neighbourhood. Full of gossip about vanished, feudal days. Her inn was dullish. A jolly old building, but no oak in it of interest. The most thrilling thing was the photograph of a gorgeous flapper in the sitting-room."

Dermot cocked an eye.

"Good lord!" he growled, "a *what?*"

"A flapper. A youthful female who has not yet put up her hair."

"What's the use of her?"

"An indelicate question. No point particular except that she looked a darling and had written 'for Toto with Janet's love' across the bottom of the photograph."

"You're the oddest chap! You spend weeks among the Yorkshire agricultural labourers, one of the most interesting set of men in the country, and you come back with nothing intelligible to say except some rot about a girl. Aren't there girls in other places?"

There were, of course, and Laddie conceded the point.

"I'm sorry. My economic observations were

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rudimentary. I saw two drunken carters in Settle. Are they any good ? ”

At least they served, for Dermot began on wages and housing conditions, which developed into a slightly confused indictment of English employers. It seemed that, despite the unusual enlightenment of the native Irish farmer, the lot of the Irish labourer was the most wretched in the world, while his English counterpart, crushed as he was by a class of brutal tyrants, lived a life if not of luxury, at least of comfort considerably in excess of his deserts. The remedy was fortunately simple ; Home Rule, universal suffrage, and the single tax. For all its one-sidedness the discussion lasted the evening out.

Bedtime relaxed the counter-irritant and left Laddie once more exposed to the fears and forebodings of the morrow. He dreamed uneasily of humiliation and failure.

II

Vanguard House was certainly horrible. It was altogether monstrous that forebodings, largely indulged in for the pleasure of their being belied, should turn out so nearly true. Everything seemed to go wrong. Laddie reached the office on this first morning in immense trepidation and so afraid of being late that he was twenty minutes too soon and had to stroll the time out, with a feverish affecta-

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tion of purpose, in the little streets near Golden Square. At last, when every native of the district seemed aware that he was new and strange and to be secretly pleased at his unhappiness and the twenty minutes were over, he heartily wanted them back again. Mounting two white marble doorsteps and pushing open a swing-door, he surveyed, over a broad mahogany counter, a large office honeycombed with partitions, counters, stove-pipes, book-shelves, and ground glass into a bewildering pattern of nooks and pockets, in every one of which a hostile clerk might be imagined as gloating over the coming of the latest victim. Truth was even more disconcerting than imagination, for all the pockets seemed empty. Laddie stood irresolute, his heart in his boots. The wall-clock ticked sulkily; the stove in its summer idleness looked dusty and tired; cigarette stubs lurked in the presumably decorative niche that ran round its lid. On the shelves, files of *Vanguards*; behind the high desk in the far corner, ledgers with green and red-brown backs, the leather torn and peeling; here and there a typewriter. But these were not lidded; someone was here. Voices—female, coming downstairs. Voices—male, coming in at the door. Awful. Laddie made a great effort. For one glorious moment longer he would quell these people to respect. Afterwards he would plunge into their contempt. Why had he never before realized the splendour of the “Gentleman wants to see Mr. So and So”—“Will you come upstairs, please, sir”—the opening door.

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"Hullo, Laddie, how are you?"—and the door clanging behind him on the servile mechanism of the lower office. All over now. Everyone of these people would know him; no one would usher him upstairs any more; he might even have to do that for visitors; awful thought; supposing someone he knew came in! Anyway, now for the final "moment."

A young man was hanging his hat on a peg; young women were filtering to their desks and typewriters. An older man, with an indescribable air of Lewisham and third-class-season politics, breathed his way heavily towards the high desk near the ledgers. No one took the slightest notice of Laddie, faltering but still determined, near the door. With difficulty he caught a roving eye.

"Is Mr. Postlethwaite in?"

"Mr. Postlethwaite's away," came promptly, devilishly. Laddie's last shreds of courage blew into cobwebs. This was horrible. He must announce himself. He, Laddie Macallister, must say his business like any new office-boy. And there was no time to think. Miserable, he stuttered that he was coming to work there—books and so on. He couldn't describe himself in Postlethwaite's foolish phrase as "literary secretary"; too Hampstead for anything. The clerk seemed puzzled. He consulted in an undertone with the man at the desk. To Laddie's immense relief the latter's face gleamed comprehension. He came forward.

"Mr. Macallister? Good morning, sir. Mr.

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Postlethwaite left word that you were coming. He is on his holiday. If you will come, I will show you upstairs."

This was better. They mounted the stairs, Laddie, through his sudden calm, hearing in his mind the criticisms of the office they had left. Two—three floors. A little light room at the back of the house with a view over near, old roofs to the scattered citadels of the new American Regent Street. For furniture, a roll-top desk, a small table bearing two telephones, an almanack, a book-case, and two or three chairs. The old man spoke—

"This was Mr. Vincent's room. He left us, you know, to go abroad."

The innocence and solemnity of the explanation! With a flash of amusement Laddie contrasted the old man's perfect discretion (he must have known) with Postlethwaite's curt frankness. But his guide was speaking again—

"Mr. Garrett is conducting the office in Mr. Postlethwaite's absence. He will be in directly. I will tell him you are here. Now, if you will excuse me, I will go downstairs again."

Even as Laddie thanked him, he vanished and left Mr. Vincent's successor to the contemplation of Mr. Vincent's room.

Laddie looked about him. Yes—there was a peg for his hat. He examined the telephones. One, the usual pedestal sort, like a snake with its head poked forward and earrings. The other, a flat box-like thing with two rows of pegs and a dial with a pointer that covered one of a half-circle of

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numbers. Timidly he moved the pointer, afraid a bell would ring. Nothing happened. He examined the desk, which was dusty and full of crumpled sheets of paper, stuffed anyhow into pigeon-holes. A specimen bundle, on being unfolded, revealed a list of addresses with cryptic words opposite each one: "phil"—"fict. (a)"—"fict. (b)"—"juv."—and so on. In the drawers were more papers, scattered clips, an empty match-box, some paper-handkerchiefs, a single glove, a cardboard box purporting to contain cigarettes.

The chairs (one was an "arm" and looked quite comfortable) were soon absorbed. There remained the book-case. Here indeed was excitement, for it was two parts full. However, on examination the greater part turned out to be political annuals, directories, reports, and so on. The remainder were trashy novels, some very minor verse and a few gigantic American books about engineering and the Elizabethan drama. Through the vanishing mists of Laddie's vision of possible plunder came the voice and—more serious still—the boots and waistcoat of Mr. Audley Garratt, viceroy of the *Vanguard*.

CHAPTER SIX

I

LIFE now presented itself under two definite and contrasted aspects. There was the office and there was the rest. This rigid discipline of times and seasons was very grateful. Not only did it satisfy the desire for "office hours," which was one factor in the revolt from Paris and general artistry, but the margin of free time was sufficiently small to ensure intense appreciation.

Laddie knew himself well enough to realize that leisure was, to him, magnificent body colour but deplorable canvas. Or, in other words, that he could with profit wrench freedom from duty, but only with anguish work from idleness. Cake is doubly good after compulsory bread-and-butter.

Certainly there were times when he envied Dermot his long sleeps and midday breakfasts; times when he cursed the work that held him within doors, cut off from the mellow riot of a London autumn. But he knew now the preciousness of Saturdays and of the blessed hours before eleven a.m.

The contrast between his two lives was, however, more than one of mere environment. Each seemed,

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in its particular way, to provide material for growth and experience, while the very antitheses were complementary. His indoor life—Magdala Houses and Golden Square—was the door through which he came to some knowledge of humanity; his outdoor and solitary life brought him to the consciousness of London, a London that spoke through miles of houses, squares, and roadways, a London at once historical and prophetic.

Adventure, in these early London days, he neither encountered nor regretted. Perhaps his training had been of a kind to develop reason at the expense of impulse. His inveterate self-criticism restrained any tendency to seek out the extraordinary; it was impossible to conceive situations of dramatic interest which had not in them something of the ridiculous. Certainly, also, he was older in knowledge than his life hitherto could, by itself, have made him. Oxford with its orgy of theoretical experience, Paris with its facile irregularities and its precocious cynicism, set a standard too severe for normal twentieth-century reality. Laddie affected, not wholly sincerely, a self-accusing sorrow.

"Nothing ever happens to me," he said to Dermot. "It's dreadfully hard to be voluptuous when you hate carpets and smoke Capstan."

Dermot, full of a strike in the Midlands, saw an unreal connection between the subject in hand and the woes of the workers. He denounced the effete selfishness of the capitalist class. During the oration Laddie amused himself with the picture

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of a stout gentleman in a white waistcoat, reclining amid eighteenth-century engravings and toying licentiously with a cigar. The vision faded with Dermot's thunderous periods. Seeing the reformer glaring at him angrily, Laddie murmured "Monstrous!" and said he wanted some barley-water. This outrageous aspiration roused his companion's convivial instincts and a bottle of wholly deplorable Irish whiskey was produced from the pocket of a crumpled overcoat, huddled over a chair in the corner of the room.

"Don't be a maudlin ass and drink this!"

Laddie did, unwillingly.

"It's peculiarly nasty," he said.

"It isn't very nice," admitted Dermot penitently, "but I met a man this afternoon who said this bottle stood between him and starvation and so I bought it."

"You certainly helped him to the nobler alternative," remarked Laddie. "I shall probably be sick shortly."

Dermot rose.

"I'm going to get a drink," he announced with the air of an inventor. "You coming?"

Receiving a faint snort by way of answer, the large young Irishman blurted from the room and was heard bouncing unevenly down the stairs and into the street. When the footsteps had died away, Laddie switched off the lights and, throwing up the window, sat on the sill smoking thoughtfully.

From association as well as from intrinsic qualifications, Magdala Houses held a high place in the

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hierarchy of Laddie's London. Their architecture was one of his standard tests, to be applied to any district that at first baffled his chronological instinct. For they were at once typical and unique. The bow-windows that blistered their façades were in themselves a tale of tragedy. Even before he heard from Miss Grogan the outline of her father's career, he read in those bow-windows a story of ill-judged ambition. They set the street apart from the thousand others in the same actual level of London penury. At the same time they affected, uncannily and pathetically enough, the bearing of the houses' inmates. The grimy lace curtains, the hanging ferns, the very backs of the looking-glasses in Magdala Houses had something of pride, something of a remembered splendour.

Miss Grogan's reminiscences, combined with observation, had made possible a fairly coherent conception of the place's history. At first things had not gone so badly. The eight new houses were quickly let, and Number Six had even been inhabited by the relict of a baronet, who hired a victoria three times a week and drove in state towards the Park. But these tremendous days were short-lived. The houses were too large for the incomes of those who cared to live in such obscurity. And there was no denying that Magdala Houses, whatever the possibilities when they were built, were, in fact, sadly away from the arteries of wealth or fashion. Westbourne Grove was to have been another Regent Street; a shopping centre as fine as Knightsbridge and more individual.

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Instead, it now attracted fewer limousines than the sinuous and squalid lane that once led from the gravel pits to Portobello Farm. Perhaps the prestige of this ridiculous ditch was the bitterest drop in the cup of disappointment which time had set to the lips of lesser Bayswater. The scorn with which the creators of this new melancholy district had regarded the old pack road is as evident to-day as fifty years ago. Portobello Road slouches, unnoticed and yet for ever reappearing, in and out of the towering and contemptuous houses that hedge it in. They turn their blank, unplastered shoulders to its sullen and muddy length, tolerating it only as a pestilent right of way, that may be ignored but cannot be destroyed.

It was, however, before the full blossoming of Portobello Road into a vegetable centre that the decadence of Magdala Houses had begun. Once begun, it ran the usual London course, and the appearance of the fatal word "Apartment" in the ground-floor bow of Number Six (Number Six too—shades of the baronet's widow!) set an example to the other houses that they were not slow to follow. With the coming of Dermot and Laddie, the largest house capitulated—Miss Grogan's own. Laddie was soon familiar with the sordid present of the road he lived in: "board-residence," "apartments," "en pension," and once again "board-residence." Number Nine—immediately opposite—was empty, its windows grimed, those in the basement broken. A crazy board lolled over the area steps; torn and faded notices marked

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through the dirty glass. One house alone—Number Five—remained a mystery and challenged speculation. It stood on the side opposite to Miss Grogan's at the farthest point from the outer world, as it were asleep between its peeling neighbour and the length of windowless gabbling that backed the strip of grass and served as back wall to the houses in the transverse street beyond. Number Five was no less paintless and sombre than its fellows. But there was a difference in the curtaining, which gave the house a look of having no sitting-rooms. There was also an indescribable air of impersonal direction, a hint of the institution about this house, which bore no door-plate and whose windows invited no lodgers. Never once, in his brief periods of daylight watch (it was dark before he left the office now) had Laddie seen anyone connected with this enigmatic house who seemed to provide a clue.

Once or twice, in the evenings, a cab had driven to the door and, after a pause of uncanny silence, had clumped away again. It was curious that after dark he had never seen anyone enter the house on foot. This fact seemed to dispose completely of the most obvious explanation of the house's function.

Even as he sat this evening at the open window, the soft misty air was troubled with the throb of an approaching cab. As a rule, the silence was ominous. A far-off murmur told of market-stalls, of raucous selling, of the throng and vigour of the Portobello crowds. From time to time electric

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trains jerked screechily along the railway to the north. But Magdala Houses and the streets about them seemed to hold their breath. On such a moistly gentle night as this the quiet had the stealthiness of deep carpeting. The beat of the taxi-engine loudened to a rattle, and the cab, feeling its way from number to number, drew up at the house of mystery. It seemed that two women, one supporting the other, crept up the steps into the shadow of the porch. The door opened soundlessly—or perhaps the starting taxi drowned the noise. In a minute the street was empty again; the curtain of stillness dropped into place. But no light showed in any window of Number Five. Laddie sat a few minutes longer while a solution of the mystery struggled for coherence in his mind. As he passed upstairs to his own room he felt, somehow, that he was not far from discovery. Still groping, he stood in front of his large book-case, studying the titles of the books with unseeing eyes. Gradually through the mists of preoccupation the name of one of them grew into clearness. It was *Furze the Cruel*, and he saw again the vision of the secret house among the lanes of Devonshire; and then, quite suddenly he understood.

Feeling rather sick he went to bed. It was the first recurrence of the disgust that had driven him from Paris. He determined passionately to put the thing from his mind. A kind of terror seized him that London would fail him, that his new idealism would come tumbling to the ground and

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leave him, shivering and outcast, among the ruins of his blind illusion. "It shall not happen!" he told himself again and again. But, for all his urgency, he knew in his heart that it inevitably must.

II

It was raw and foggy. Eminently an evening for solitude, big chair, and novel. Laddie drank his coffee with a chortle of anticipatory pleasure.

"I've some men coming to-night," said Dermot suddenly.

"Are they pretty?" queried Laddie flippantly.

Dermot grinned, secretly a little pleased.

"No—real men. We're going to have a kind of meeting."

"Well, I don't object, if you keep quiet and don't disturb me. I shall play the piano and write a ballad about death."

"But we are meeting in the big room; there are quite a number coming. I thought you might be interested."

"I'm not a bit. Only my annoyance tarnishes a serene indifference. Who are they?"

"Delamotte is coming—and Wilkinson and Verrall and—oh, that lot."

"Delamotte is coming, is he?" Laddie was almost serious. "The other statesmen are mere names. Whose wrongs are you discussing?"

"You're always very offensive about my

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friends," said Dermot plaintively. "If they were like the man you brought to lunch yesterday I shouldn't blame you, but they never wear starched collars with blue stripes."

Laddie laughed. He had been compelled, the day before, to include in his lunch with Dermot an aggressively elegant member of the *Vanguard's* staff, who, starting from an erroneous idea that he facially resembled Oscar Wilde, pursued Laddie with talk of literature, conceived in the manner of Turnham Green's most cultured circle.

"Poor Gerald! But he would come. And he told me of a first edition I wanted the other day,"

"No reason why he should dress like a stock-broker in a punt. As to the wrongs we are to discuss—the meeting is connected with the amalgamation of the Dockers' and Stevedores' Unions."

"My dear Dermot, the stimulus! What are stevedores?"

Dermot wasn't sure, but he knew their grievances, and that was enough.

"Perhaps one will come and then I can ask him," said Laddie. And a ring at the bell sent Dermot hurrying downstairs and Laddie up, the one to open the door, the other to get the best seat.

The reformers trickled in. Verrall wore a dinner jacket, and his pale narrow face was devoid of expression of any kind. As befitted a fellow of King's, he used a very long cigarette holder and affected the enigmatic. Sometimes he talked in Greek, but only when English might have been used with

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equal effect. An ingenious way of giving value to platitudes.

With him came a bluff, bearded man in a jersey and large boots, who was apparently secretary of something or other and seemed worried about what he called the "mynewts" of the last meeting. Laddie, while objecting to the tobacco he smoked, appreciated his speaking to Moses. Verrall regarded this amiable piece of weakness with superior calm.

"Dogs are undertaxed," he remarked gratuitously.

"This one is also underfed. He is very fierce."

Laddie's face was as sphinxlike as the other's. Verrall turned away with a sniff and jerked himself across the room to where Dermot was dispensing whiskey to three foolish-looking young men with red ties and too many pimples.

The next arrival was Wilkinson, member of Parliament for an East London division and famous for the consistency with which, although officially a Liberal, he voted with the Labour Party against the Government. He sidled into the room with his mouth open and heaved apologies for unpunctuality. When he laughed (as he did too often) his eyebrows went up into his hair and he waved his nose. He had a pleasant voice and nice hands. His movements had a curious, blundering apology about them, which irritated Moses and disarranged the rugs.

Dermot, shaking himself free from hosting, crossed the room to Laddie.

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"Play something," he whispered hoarsely, "till we can begin."

"What shall I play? The Land Song or Bach or ragtime?"

"Any old thing."

Laddie moved to the piano (Moses bundled off the sofa and padded after him) and strummed away at whatever entered his head. The sudden music affected the guests diversely. Verrall glanced at the piano, compressed his lips and continued his conversation. Wilkinson beamed suddenly, as though in violent gratitude to everyone for everything, and stood hunched against the mantelpiece, eating his fingers. Two freshcomers jigged unashamedly at the tunes they knew, and also, when they thought the other was not looking, at those they did not. One of the foolish young men began to whistle, but Laddie routed him instantly by a brief interlude of Schumann, from which he never recovered.

The company increased. Finally Laddie heard Dermot ask whether anyone knew where Delamotte was. Verrall had seen him at Gatti's dining with two women.

"Hope he'll bring them along!" said a fat man who wore his hat, and whose hoarse laughter seemed unjustified by the quality of the joke. It must have been a joke, for Wilkinson looked shocked and changed the subject plungingly.

The bell rang again, causing a stir of anticipation among the company. In a few moments loud tramplings and a nasal voice, that seemed to

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Laddie familiar, became increasingly audible. Delamotte entered first, his heavy jowl and huge body ominous and sullen. Behind him came a young man in a silk hat and a waisted overcoat, carrying a long stick with a knob and playing with a dangling eyeglass.

"Lord!" said Laddie aloud, "it's Dolly Vardon!"

"Hello-o!" cried the young man, fixing his monocle. "I thought you were keeping a hostel for Post-Impressionists in Montmartre. What brings you to this dismal capital?"

For a few moments they talked. Vardon now lived in chambers in the Inner Temple. He had happened on Delamotte on his way to Magdala Houses and had been persuaded to join the party.

"I'll tell you all about it on some less solemn occasion," replied Laddie. "Who is the man who came with you?"

"Fielden of the 'Fiery Cross.'"

"I didn't know you were a 'friend of the people.' Since when this passion for liberty?"

"Lawyers have duties as well as privileges," returned Vardon sententiously. "It would never do to let things get out of hand."

"You are a poisonous race," was Laddie's comment.

"Not if applied externally."

"Sort of embrocation touch?"

"Exactly. Our friend Gill is about to speak."

A silence fell on the room. Dermot ejected the first hundred words he could think of and sat

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down. Verrall rose. He spoke with a level coldness and fluency, his tidy, supercilious voice free from all enthusiasm. His talent was academic rather than oratorical, and quotations jostled dates with bewildering speed. Vardon, seated beside Laddie on the sofa, sneered into vacancy. Dermot, visibly impressed by the speech, pulled his tousled hair and gazed with honest eyes at the speaker. The three young men took notes. Delamotte seemed to be asleep.

Laddie listened. The speaker was as easy to follow as a competent lecturer. That is to say, argument grew from argument with elementary precision. But the flat, clever voice held no conviction.

"He doesn't care a damn either way," Laddie whispered to Vardon.

"He has his parting to consider," replied the other, without moving a muscle.

The meeting continued. The bluff man made a stormy, unpractised speech full of oaths and raw, terrible conviction. Verrall sat with a half smile, as though to say: "Hark to the honest fellow. A little rough, perhaps, but with a good heart." Laddie could picture some renegade *aristo* listening with just such contemptuous tolerance to violent speeches in revolutionary Paris. He wondered why men like the speaker submitted to the lifeless brilliance of this catacomb don.

Men spoke and sat down; there was no applause. At last Fielden rose. He had the wasted beauty of the martyr and his fine eyes searched the very

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souls of his audience. The discussion had become more and more general and Fielden attacked the provincialism of the average trade union official.

"No educated employer will condescend to parley with the sort of representatives the men are forced to send. You can't train practical men into diplomats by throwing them scraps of University learning. Get you a committee of people who have suffered, not a handful of blasé scholars who like a dash of Socialism as condiment for weariness of life. I tell you," he went on excitedly, "when the revolution comes there will be no mercy for gentlemen-rankers! We like our enemies and our friends for their courage, not their tolerance!"

The company was moved. The bluff man said "Shame!" loudly. Dermot gave a scared look towards Verrall, who sat, a shade paler than usual, biting his lip and tapping the floor with his foot. The fat man (still wearing his hat) remarked: "Chase me, girls!" and rolled a fishy eye. The situation seemed critical. Fielden was about to proceed, when Delamotte suddenly heaved to his feet. With immense deliberation and infinite skill he brought the subject round to the business in hand. Laddie marvelled at him. His knowledge of the technicalities of the Docker-Stevedore crisis was plainly nil, but he contrived to avoid all detailed reference to it, concentrating on an unpopular peer (of recent creation), who led the opposition to the men in all disputes, and lighting round the body of this victim one of those fires of

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scorn for which he was famous. His humour charmed the good temper of the meeting back again. When he sat down, cheerful conversation broke out on all sides. Only Verrall with his pale eyes sat motionless looking at the fire, while his foot beat out its intermittent tune upon the floor.

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When they had all gone :

"Were you amused?" asked Dermot.

"Not in the least. On the contrary, rather depressed. If these fellows are the future, God help us. That agitator chap from Cambridge seemed to me really dangerous. He's the kind of man to set a country on fire in order to warm his poor, frozen little soul, A sort of Syndicalist Nero."

"At least then you admit he has the power to light a fire?"

"I do," admitted Laddie gloomily, "and you, you dear, generous, unsuspecting old thing, are a faggot to his hand. When the blaze comes, he'll not be the one to scorch. Ugh! He gives me shivers."

Dermot looked at him with a puzzled frown.

"You don't understand," he murmured. "I wish you weren't so flippant about the thing. Verrall is the keenest mind we have, and there are different kinds of courage. Some say the courage of the forerunner is greater than that of the actual leaders in the fight; and a fight there must be—absolutely *must*. Capitalism and its sycophants will never listen to reason. Only fear will drive

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them—fear and destruction. As for Verrall scorching—I wonder if you realize what he goes through now from the class he has betrayed . . . ? ”

Laddie softened and felt a twinge almost of shame. He walked to the door.

“ Sometimes, Dermot, I feel I might love your cause and fight for it. But not always. I suppose I funk it really. I am one of those with something to lose.”

The other nodded.

“ Verrall has lost it,” he murmured.

Laddie went to bed feeling a brute, but shrinking from the logical conclusion to which that feeling led. He was also not wholly convinced of the self-immolation of Verrall. Do martyrs wear dinner-jackets? And yet again—why not?

III

Dermot threw the *Vanguard* on to the window-seat.

“ A very poor number,” he remarked. “ One of the worst I remember. The Irish question isn’t mentioned once all the way through. That’s a good letter from Verrall about the ‘ single tax.’ ”

“ Can’t think why the old man puts that fellow’s stuff in at all,” said Laddie crossly. “ And as a matter of fact it is rather a good number. Did you read Clement Sprigg on ‘ Conrad ’ ? ”

“ I did not. Why would I? For all the good that literary section of yours does, you might stay

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in bed all day. What do you do with yourself at the office ? ”

“ I vary. I write my column and snipe the nicest review books and answer letters and all that kind of thing. People drop in to tell me what good novelists they are, and poets call with villanelles. On press day I really do some work. I’m going to a party to-night. Will you come ? ”

“ What kind of party ? ”

“ Brilliant young artists, willowy maidens, caricaturists, perhaps a real Bohemian or two.”

“ Doesn’t sound quite my kind.”

“ Maybe not. Your amalgamated what’s-his-names weren’t *my* kind, but I came. Don’t be narrow.”

But Dermot persisted in his refusal.

It was Sunday morning and Laddie had been with Postlethwaite some seven months. Dermot always read the *Vanguard* on Sunday mornings and insult was a weekly ritual.

The winter had proved the success of the joint abode. Dermot secretly admired his friend’s precision and somewhat timid orderliness ; also he liked to lie on the sofa with a calamitous pipe and jig his legs, while Laddie vamped the latest rag-time on the piano. It was, on the other hand, impossible for Laddie not to love the Irishman’s warm, chaotic heart, his infectious sense of the ridiculous, even his squalid habits. For, as time went on, Dermot became more and more promiscuous in his amusements and in his democratic

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strivings. There were occasions when he disappeared altogether for one or even two nights at a time, returning in a bad temper and uncommunicative. Laddie gathered that the pleasures of Lambeth, Fulham, or Thornton Heath were much more stimulating than those of Piccadilly. He wondered at first why Dermot so scrupulously shielded his extravagances from his home and his companion. For shielded (so far as Dermot could hide anything) they undoubtedly were. One episode, unsuccessfully concealed, left him almost apologetic. For several days he treated Laddie with a propitiatory nervousness that was both embarrassing and absurd. Slowly it dawned on Laddie that Dermot regarded these outbreaks as likely to offend most deeply both his friend and his landlady. The reasoning was obscure. Laddie did nothing to earn this reputation for censoriousness, and poor Miss Grogan could never regard anything Dermot did as in the slightest degree imperfect. Probably, in some vague way, Dermot was still living under the impulse of the schoolboy theory that there are things done at home and things done at school, and that the two must not be mixed. Whatever the motive, the effect on Laddie was to make him intensely critical, not of his friend's behaviour but of his own. Few people, if put on a pedestal, can refrain from striking the expected attitude, and Laddie would have regarded backsliding on his part, whether towards drink or gambling or women as a kind of insult to Dermot's conception of his nature. The mood of reaction

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from so-called "gaiety," the mood in which he had first returned to London, became, under the influence of this additional impulse to abstinence, a habit that no effort was needed to maintain. His life became a cult of London as a thing of bricks and mortar, of squares, crescents, and alleyways. The human element was strictly practical—the *Vanguard* and its appurtenances, a handful of writers (mere acquaintances these), those of his Oxford friends who were available—and Dermot. Perhaps Dermot most of all. He had an "always-thereness" which was comforting and staunch. Intimacy reached the perfection of unembarrassed silences, of talk so cryptic, so (to the stranger) meaningless, that its every syllable had tenfold value to the wise. And of all times of talk Sunday mornings were the best, when the church bells honked and the wide, untidy streets rustled with hurrying footsteps or echoed metalically the newsboy in the Portobello Road.

Conversation dropped to give the unhappy invitation decent burial. Then Laddie, leaning forward to knock his pipe into the well-littered grate, opened a fresh topic.

"I sometimes wonder whether one marries."

"Marries? So they tell me. You ought to. You'd look charming pushing a bassinette."

"What's a bassinette, Dermot?"

"Whom are you going to marry?" replied his friend, meeting the question with another.

"I never said I was going to marry anyone, but

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as you seem to make a point of it, I'll consider any suggestions."

"If you go and take up with some anæmic, worn-out sprig of a rotten aristocracy I shall never forgive you. Some wisp of lawn and velvet no more able to bear children . . ."

"Dermot! I shan't marry as a favour to the census. Do the working-classes?"

No notice whatever was taken of this remark. Dermot picked his teeth and stared moodily at a Cezanne lithograph on the wall. Laddie spoke more seriously:

"Do you remember last night I apologized for not being a democrat? I believe if I never mixed with middle-class Liberals and belonged to the Junior Carlton or the Marlborough, I could manage it."

"I absolve you from conscious plagiarism, but the idea is old. All Tory journalists are Radical, all vivisectionists are married to women with poodles."

"And all Home Rulers live in England?"

"Certainly not——!" Dermot sat up. He was evidently on the edge of a speech.

"Don't, dear lad, don't! I withdraw. But I lunched at a Radical and Nonconformist club last week (with Crawshay, you know—sort of man who assumes one likes spinach) and really the people . . .! Eyes too close together, beards too far apart. . . ."

Dermot grinned suddenly.

"I've thought of a joke—one of your sort. I

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shall make it. 'How would you sum up the Guards' Club smoking-room?' 'Too many men talking through their spats.' All right; no charge. You can use it."

"Dermot, I shall leave the building. If my conversation sounds like that, the sooner it is silenced the better. I shall take Moses for a walk."

Sunday morning was over.

IV

When Laddie returned from his party, the Irishman was rearranging his books. This process involved taking the whole collection out of the shelves and leaving them in the middle of the floor. Next morning Miss Grogan put them back again.

"Hope you enjoyed yourself," he grunted.

"Instructive. The girls had short hair and yellow trousers."

"Why?"

"I think it improves their sense of line. Unconscious line is the new thing—a sort of soul rhythm. There was a man there who had invented painting with the eyes shut. Paris is, I am told, revolutionized by the discovery. You see, the eye inevitably encounters material objects and the form of these objects influences the sense of line. This is of course deplorable. Therefore if you draw with your eyes shut, only the essence of your

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memory of the scene or subject to be depicted is transferred to canvas. No gross realism."

Dermot groaned.

"Decadence, decadence," he murmured.

"Possibly," replied Laddie sharply, "but don't say so. That is the view of middle-aged prejudice, and as such must be disputed."

Undressing, he smiled a little bitterly at the events of the evening, for the real drama of the party had not been told to Dermot. Obviously not—for Dermot knew nothing of Dacre, and the blindfold innovator was none other. Laddie had seen him instantly on entering the crowded room. Evidently new art movements paid in Paris, for Dacre wore an expensive velvet coat, knee-breeches and a stock. Dark side whiskers set off the loose riot of his handsome face. He affected amiable forgetfulness, shook hands pleasantly and, after a languid exchange of commonplace, turned with weary magnanimity to patronize a group of adoring girls. Their adoration was not of the nineties, but anyone with a working knowledge of twentieth-century Bohemia could recognize their abrupt aloofness for the grovelling it was.

Laddie was soon bored. The people present abominated two things above all else—fluency and the Oxford manner. Laddie had both and they despised him. He, for his part, could not share their artistic values (even Greco was now condemned as photographic) and any sympathy he might have had for revolutionary ideas as such was stifled, first by the harsh awkwardness deliberately

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affected by the votaries, and then by all the associations that followed in a rush on the reappearance of Dacre. He was preparing to leave when the guest of honour forestalled him. As he lounged to the door, trailing a ragged string of silent, angular, disciples, Dacre paused in front of Laddie.

"Good night," he said in a clear voice. "You needn't trouble to run away this time. I'm off to Paris again to-morrow morning."

Thrusting aside, with an enormous effort, all sense of the reaction of this taunt on the immediate situation, Laddie flogged his brain to lightning action. It did not fail him.

"What a rush for you!" he replied sweetly. "So inconsiderate of Miss Thurston to be jealous of poor London!"

Dacre flamed scarlet. But the scales had tipped too far. He had timed his own sneer perfectly, without, however, reckoning on the facile mind of his opponent. The contemptuous swing, which was to turn his back on the discomfited Laddie and launch him triumphantly to the door, had already begun. It was too late to reply; any check would now be a confession of defeat. Scowling savagely he vanished.

Laddie, feeling breathless and a little hysterical, shut his mouth tight and said good night to his host. He got out of the house without encountering Dacre again. Five minutes' walking cooled the excitement that the wholly unexpected incident had created. Other less stimulating emotions took its place. He fell into fruitless bandying of silent

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argument, in which conscience and vanity throbbed out their futile squabbling. The naked fact was that Dacre's taunt had in it an element—the merest element perhaps, but still an element—of truth. It was ludicrous to say Laddie left Paris in order to run away from Dacre, but was it ludicrous to charge him with having welcomed the summons home as an escape from an awkward predicament? Vanity put up a poor fight. The justice of the charge was undeniable. That point established, it was equally undeniable that Dacre's presentment of the facts was hard to controvert. Coincidence is the worst possible excuse. Laddie heard himself protesting:

“My mother was dying—forced to leave at once. . . .”

How absurdly thin it sounded!

“Of course,” they would echo politely—“to leave at once. . . .”

He sought to dispel the obsession. No one at the party heard; if they had heard, they had not understood; if they had understood, they were not interested; if they were interested, their lust for the unusual would applaud rather than condemn the cowardice; if they did condemn, who cared for their rotten verdict? But the force of the reasoning exhausted, the uneasiness came dripping slowly back—oozing into the chamber of his brain. They must have heard; Dacre's voice was purposely so clear. They must have understood; the implication was far from subtle and insult always interested. Unconventionality that worshipped

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cowardice was a refinement yet undiscovered. . . . However contemptible an individual, however negligible his opinion, he can and will talk. And things get round. . . .

Thus he battled with his own conscience, over-fatigue exaggerating his distress. Only the aptness of his answer comforted. That had gone home. It was a shrewd guess that Freda Thurston had dealt ruthlessly with her Dacre. . . .

And after this fashion the months went by. As for London the divine, that mad, unreal divinity perished, had Laddie known it, on the autumn evening which betrayed the secret of the house opposite. His forced preoccupation with things rather than with people was the stone upon its tomb. He deliberately neglected the social opportunities that seemed to offer. He went to no dances, no evening parties. He paid no calls, except the minimum that Sunday afternoon and parental wish inevitably demand. Dermot, most sociable of mortals, assumed with his fine humility that this pursuit of solitude signified intellect, and refrained, often with considerable regret, from filling Magdala Houses with earnest reformers or with light and frivolous young women. He went out both for his mental and physical amusements.

For this consideration Laddie was grateful. But he did not voice his gratitude. He began to get morose, as the hobby he had hoped was genuine showed itself, ever more clearly, to be merely

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another refuge from unpalatable reality. Profoundly was he dissatisfied with his own indefiniteness. Even Dermot was black and white ; he was only grey. His clear-cut mentality was moonlight, choked by the fog of a blurred morality. Of what use is critical acumen without a basis of purpose ? Blindly he groped for this essential aim, something to justify his spiritual adventures ; but his fumbling grasped only affectation and levity. His satisfactions became trivial and forced. He was at pains to notice differences of structure in coaches on the Underground. He wondered why green-grocers were often also furniture removers ; why Hammersmith Broadway, with the possible exception of Enghien-les-Bains, is the nastiest place in Europe ; why there are no bookshops in Deptford ; why the highbrow young man always sneers at Bayswater. Bayswater and what it stands for are real London, because they are normal level. The ordinary is the truth.

In effect all this was merely logical extension of another pose. Vardon tried to explain this simple fact one evening at Gambrinus.

" Why are *you* here," he asked, " when you have been to the ' Britannia ' in Hoxton ? You should be swilling bitter in Wapping. This is where fashion plays at simple pleasure. Your ideal is the lower middle class. You know the stunt of every name on a music-hall bill, the stars who posture and glare outside each picture palace. Attitude, my dear Laddie, nothing but attitude. Your very inconsistency shows it. Belloc, with

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his beer and Sussex roads, What's-his-name with his grand old English humour. And you call yourself the only survival of the commonplace ! Good heavens, man, don't you realize that the real commonplace is utterly unthinking, that it cannot be conscious because it is itself a negation of consciousness ? ”

“ But I like music-halls,” objected Laddie, “ and beer and Pauline Frederick and tops of buses . . . ”

“ I daresay—but on purpose. Just as young novelists like adolescence and the Leicester Lounge. The “ squalahad ” or tolerant-purity school of modern fiction is a perfect analogy to that of beer and mediæval, catholic jollity.”

Possibly Vardon's scorn hastened the end of Laddie's London period. It was soon a decadence. In despair and by hazard he lighted on the path to salvation and began to notice Londoners' ways, their kindly violence of speech, their natural humour, outraged and overlaid by a vulgarity they mistook for progress, but unresentful as only England in her myriad forms can be.

His daily bus-ride to the office took him past a building hugely labelled “ Funland. Entrance Free.” But the entry was blocked with roller-blinds and tattered posters cried TO LET. An outlying music-hall announced the “ Ante-depression drama ! ‘ Somewhere a heart lies bleeding ! ’ ” A little knowledge. . . . But who cared ? And did it really matter very much ? Or perhaps it was commercial candour . . . ?

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Unconsciously he was a little older. Perspective was altering. To the tale of wonder that was life another chapter had been added. At Oxford—the wonder of theory ; in Paris—of freedom ; since then—of London. And he slid, this time by evolution rather than by reaction, into the alluring darkness of a further phase.

CHAPTER SEVEN

I

LADY FINEDON lived the simple life on Campden Hill. The variety of existence she affected was only possible to ladies with large incomes and either dead or unusually complacent husbands. It was the former of those rare combinations of good fortune that Lady Finedon was lucky enough to possess. Sir Valentine Finedon had worked himself to death in the cause of Morris-dancing and mediæval artistry some years before his widow comes within the scope of this story. It is therefore unnecessary to enquire further into his virtues beyond the understanding that he left his wife very amply provided for, and that the curious may, if they visit Evenstowe in Gloucestershire, observe what was once a very beautiful old house, now glorified by beaten copper work and art-stencilling and the stronghold of the Finedon Community of Craftsmen, a group of reclaimed artisans from Wolverhampton, presided over by a lady in sandals and permeated by a wholly false conception of the mediæval mind and its activities.

Lady Finedon had a contempt for Society as

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Mayfair knows it and a distaste for beautifying the lives of the working-classes. She sold the Cotswold Manor and the great house in Grosvenor Square as soon after her husband's death as decency and house-agents allowed, establishing herself in the top four floors of an eccentric, tower-like building erected in the seventies by a speculative madman near the waterworks on Campden Hill. Nor did her instinct play her false, for the new residence provided exactly the background needed for the style of life she proposed to adopt. This was a life of Art ; not narrow, intolerant Art, nor messy, practical Art, but Art in its social, its manifold, its leonine aspects, Art which embraced—besides painting, literature, music and so on—religion, philosophy, education, and science. In short, Lady Finedon wished to make of her lofty dwelling a lighthouse of the mind, which should shed its brilliant and cultured rays over the dark waters of untutored London. Her qualifications were immense. She had a fine presence and an infinite command of voice and language. She could glow with the enthusiasm of the feminist, she could moan with the Celtic poet. Her silences outdid the Eastern mystic, her epigrams glittered unabashed among those of the youngest decadent genius. German philosophers found her profound and receptive ; musicians were stimulated by her taste and her appreciation. No manifestation of the spirit could catch her unawares. And for all her adaptability (which was notorious) she never lost the power of ruling her varied subjects, for she

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knew that in the armour of every rebel genius there is a chink of bravado, and that no one, whose power to find that chink with the arrow of mockery is patent and recognized, can, with impunity, be affronted. Accordingly, over the heads of her protégés she held the threat of exposure and they for their part liked her and her hospitality too well to grudge the slight subservience her vanity demanded.

When Laddie received an invitation to the Dark Tower, as Lady Finedon's lighthouse was popularly called among the Childe Rolands of intellectual London, he did not worry himself overmuch with the problem of why the card that lay beside his plate had come his way at all. Lady Finedon threw her net wide and Laddie knew enough to regard his enmeshment with no undue conceit. Especially so as he did not want to go. He hated evenings out, when the effort meant dress-clothes and talking to women.

Dermot encouraged him, however, to accept Lady Finedon's invitation.

"You never know whom you won't meet there who'll be useful," he urged. "Don't be a fool and shirk, just because you think you'll be bored. All wire-pulling is boring, but it has to be done."

And though Laddie smiled a little at his friend's honest opportunism, he reluctantly despatched a tasteful note to Lady Finedon, expressing his gratitude for her kind invitation, which he had much pleasure in accepting. . . .

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It was well into July and very hot. The day of the Dark Tower crush blazed horribly over London. "Awful!" thought Laddie, as he sat at his desk in his shirt-sleeves and despatched the few new books that there were to their various reviewers. "The place will be an inferno."

His worst forebodings were realized. The Dark Tower seemed to swarm with humanity. How Lady Finedon got all these people in July, and where they came from, was a mystery. Each floor seemed to have its lion. There was a Mesopotamian Medicine Man in a blue robe and a turban in the large lounge hall, surrounded by scraggy women and horrible little men with beards, all of whom seemed to be taking advantage of the Oriental's enigmatic silences to talk as much as possible themselves. The drawing-room on Lady Finedon's first floor (no one could say what rank it held in the building as a whole) was loud with the latest new pianist, who had, with sensational results, either added a semitone or taken one away from the ordinary octave. Higher up it was no better.

Greeting such people as he knew, Laddie moved vaguely upwards and, after an hour's struggle, reached the roof garden. This was at least cooler than the house and the view was amazing. The great heat of the day had intensified into an unmistakable menace of thunder and the sky was now a black canopy of cloud, with, here and there, the strangled pallor of a star striving against extinction. In the ominous darkness the street lamps

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of the city shone brightly defiant. From the miles of houses, their irregularities more suggested than actually visible in the haze of lower light, the murmur and movement of London seemed to rise in waves of heat and muffled noise. Far away to westward the cessation of the lamps told of the distant country, with the allurements of grass and great trees and cool, untortured night. The trough of Notting Dale showed a flare of torches, a market probably. Towards and beyond Magdala Houses, Bayswater, Westbourne Park, Kensal, stretched interminably and splendidly superfluous. Kensington Gardens, in their turn, strove to suggest country, but in vain. Even in the darkness the day's throng of nursemaids and strolling fashion seemed still to twitter and strut along the gravel walks.

Laddie forgot the intellectual hive on which he stood. His spirit had flown from the tower and was moving slowly and dreamily over the miles and miles of mysterious, unguessable London, the London that it loved. A distant flash and a faint rumble of thunder recalled him to the moment. He thrilled with excitement. What good fortune to be here of all places! He settled himself against a mighty chimney stack and prepared to watch the storm break and beat upon the city.

The thunder was following closer now upon the ever-approaching lightning flashes. Acton was flickering with dizzy rapidity from blinding light to utter blackness. Even as he thought the storm should now be reaching Shepherd's Bush,

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a savage rent in the sky threw up into vivid, pitiless relief the blotched and rotten squalor of the White City. The impress of its pitiful nakedness danced before his eyes against the background of the inky darkness that fell like a curtain over the vision. The next instant the thunder was ricochetting in his ears. The great building seemed to quiver; the chimney stack rocked and trembled. Laddie felt suddenly exalted and translated. His life fell away from him, a useless garment. He was soaring through vast regions of dazzling light, while on every side great and beautiful ideas boomed and sang their mighty song. Then there came to him, through the thunderous harmonies, the answer to his yearnings and his discontent. In that moment he knew the secret of his destiny, the escape from the maze of intellectual experience. He began to sink on clouds of happiness slowly downwards, soothed and rocked in the arms of this tremendous revelation.

A sputter of raindrops on his face gave him back mortality. He knew that he was on the roof of Lady Finedon's house, in dress clothes, and that it was beginning to rain very hard. He shook himself and stood upright.

"I must go now," he said aloud, "and find my wife."

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II

Just inside the doorway that led back into the house he found her. At the top of the spiral staircase a window with a deep and low embrasure faced to northwards. Perched on the broad stone sill, her arms clasping her knees, her eyes gazing dreamily over London, was a young girl. In the half light that crept round the stairs from the landing below, Laddie could see the red glint of golden hair, the slim beauty of the bare, white arm. The suddenness of the encounter startled him and he uttered a little cry, half of apology, half of surprise.

“ I beg your pardon ! ”

The girl turned towards him eyes that shone wide and wondering in the darkness.

“ Isn't it heavenly ? ”

But Laddie had recognized her. Involuntarily he said the only name he knew :

“ Janet—at last ! ”

She wrinkled her forehead and her nose hitched up a little, adorably.

“ Perhaps if it wasn't so dark—— ” She peered at him ; then with a shy laugh, “ I'm dreadfully sorry but I really don't—— ”

Laddie came to himself. He felt his face flush scarlet and thanked Heaven for the gloom.

“ How awful of me ! I really apologize most humbly. You've never seen me in your life, nor

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I you ; but I saw a photograph of you not so long ago, and it had no other name written on it—only Janet. But it was inexcusable. Are you very angry with me ? ”

She did not answer but seemed to be studying him with puzzled attention.

“ A photograph of me ? Where ? ”

“ At Stonecliffe. I was lodging with an old Mrs. Bottomley—last summer—my father has taken a house up there. You were on the mantelpiece,” he added inconsequently.

She gurgled.

“ Whose mantelpiece ? ” Then, without waiting for an answer : “ Isn’t Toto a dear ? She was my nurse. I live close to Stonecliffe, just over the shoulder—in Scarthdale. You may know the house. This storm was reminding me of it, and I wish, oh I do wish I was there ! ”

“ An opening for a semblance of annoyance,” commented Laddie. “ I shall not fill it. I was behind the chimney—just there, feeling like a Blake drawing and getting rather wet.”

The girl either did not know who Blake was, or did not choose to reply to his remark. Her eyes studied his face. Laddie returned her gaze with careful gravity. His sight was by now accustomed to the half light and he made out a supple young body and a curve of shoulder that lost itself in the misty shadows of red-gold hair. The light from below touched its gleam with caressing fingers. He could not see the face very clearly. The storm had been either quiescent or unnoticed. He

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suddenly wished for lightning and lightning came. He had a glimpse of a grave and candid face, a small full mouth, a forehead crowned with the plait of hair which bound her head. Serious wide eyes looked steadily into his.

He groped in his mind after the emotions he had gone through, out there on the roof. Clearly there came to him the sound of his own voice and the words he had uttered as he turned to come in from the rain. Why had he said that? Again he spoke involuntarily aloud:

"I wonder why I said that?"

The girl's voice answered him quite naturally:

"Don't let me delay the search."

"The search? Oh, that's over—at present."

He pulled himself together, rather horrified at this half-unconscious conversation. "I say, what am I talking about?"

Again she gurgled deliciously:

"It was my fault. But I couldn't help over-hearing. Ought we to go down to the others?"

"Good Lord, no!" replied Laddie hastily.

"Anything but that. Unless you want to, I mean."

This time she laughed outright.

"You are funny. What's the matter with you?"

And Laddie wondered bitterly what was indeed the matter with him. He concentrated his attention, with great determination, on the actual present.

"I don't know. The thunder, I suppose. Anyway I'm all right again now. Tell me about

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Scarthdale. If I didn't love London so much, I should find it hard to forgive your living there always. But it would be a joy to be out of this inferno of flapdoodle. Why are you here at all ? ”

“ Lady Finedon is my aunt and I'm doing one of my periodical London visits. I fear I don't love the place at all. Ought I to ? ”

“ Certainly you ought,” said Laddie gravely. “ It is the most divinely stupid and the most utterly romantic place in the world. Have you ever been to Gospel Oak ? ”

“ Never.”

“ Ah, well—that explains a lot. I suppose you've pottered round the West End and even motored to Richmond. But that's not London. Some day I'll show you.”

“ Some day ? ”

Laddie was exasperated.

“ It's no good apologizing. I feel as though I was two people at once. It's confusing enough for me ; for you it must be lunacy. Let us talk about something dreadfully prosaic. To begin with, if it isn't to be simply ‘ Janet ’ and nothing more, I must do the policeman and ask for your name and address.”

“ Tring, Scarthdale, Skipton, Yorkshire. One good turn deserves another, Mr.—Macallister.”

“ How in the world—— ? ”

“ Sheer brain. I deduced it. Father is full of the famous Canon who has taken the Old Hall and called it Greywethers, and I risked a shot.”

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"Perfectly accurate. My other name is, properly speaking, Ian. At least so I believe. Some idiot aunt nicknamed me 'Laddie' (the reasons are obscure) and I am now never called anything else. When are you going home?"

"The day after to-morrow."

"Then perhaps we may travel north together?"

"Would that be quite proper?"

"No, it wouldn't. But I'll go into a smoking carriage at all the stops and cut you dead at Skipton."

"You seem able to arrange your holidays at very short notice."

Laddie laughed gaily.

"You must have second sight or something. I think it will be all right. But you have not yet approved the plan."

"I don't see how I can prevent your going north the day after to-morrow, even if I wanted to?"

"Do you want to?"

"'Even if I wanted to,' " I said.

"But *do* you want to?"

She smiled slowly.

"I never try to forecast St. Pancras."

And Laddie felt his heart warm with pleasure.

The advent of a third person dissipated the cloud of embarrassment that threatened. The new-comer was, so far as her silhouette against the lighted staircase betrayed her at all, a youngish woman with a curious fluff of hair standing out round her head like a Spanish chestnut.

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"Oh, *there* you are, Janet! I've looked everywhere. Aunt Isabel wants you——"

As she caught sight of Laddie in his shadowy corner she broke off a moment, then went on:

"——if your conversation won't be too rudely interrupted."

Laddie wasn't sure whether this was conventional politeness or sarcasm. He retired behind his outer defences and spoke languidly:

"Miss Tring will welcome you. Our silence was becoming longer than our slight acquaintance allows."

"This is Mr. Macallister, Barbara; we have been talking shop about the Yorkshire moors. Mr. Macallister—my cousin Miss Carnforth."

Laddie acknowledged the brusquely awkward bow accorded him by Miss Carnforth and followed the two down the spiral stair.

The landing light set Janet's hair dazzlingly ablaze. "A glorious colour," thought Laddie, "and what shoulders!" They were, in truth, pathetic, girlish shoulders, a little thin, appealing in their youth. It was characteristic of Laddie to admire them with the eagerness and almost the phraseology of the more usual praise given to shoulders of a rounded, Junoesque magnificence. But then he was always inveighing against the cult of the "fine woman."

He absorbed her frailty at a glance. In appearance she was in her teens, but he wondered whether, after all, she was quite as young as she looked; she might be twenty even. Her supple movements

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spoke of moorland and healthy freedom. "None of the aggressive, tight, neatness of cousin Barbara," he commented to himself. Barbara annoyed him rather; her hair was so conceitedly rebellious. Altogether a tiresome little thing; probably a cat as well.

Lady Finedon swept towards them from the door of the studio, a long room that ran down one side of her top floor. Her voice had the polished condescension of the hostess born. She smiled with a vast and weary gentleness.

"Come, Janet dear. I want to introduce you to Signor Francetti. He admired your hair and he is the colour craze of London. Such a brilliant artist."

The girl was carried into the studio on the wave of her aunt's immensity. Laddie decided Signor Francetti was God's own boulder and, for the moment, hated Lady Finedon. Then he remembered Miss Carnforth. Something combative in him urged him to try a lance with her. She seemed so infernally sure of herself. Even as he turned to the attack he reminded himself of his own feminist leanings, of his wordy defences of self-reliant women; surely if these were genuine, Miss Carnforth should be a triumph not an irritation?

He maintained his drawl:

"Ought I to have heard of Signor Francetti?"

Miss Carnforth's face subtly expressed her indifference, alike to the questioner and to his duty.

"I haven't the least idea. I never have, but then I don't pretend to know about art."

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(What a nasty woman she is, thought Laddie. Somehow every remark puts me in the wrong.)

But he was not beaten yet.

"A courageous attitude in a niece of Lady Finedon's. I hoped you were an artist yourself."

"Why?"

"Because there are not enough women artists, and what there are leave plenty of room for improvement."

"Women create more important things than art," she snapped. "They create the artists themselves."

As she spoke Laddie had her measure. Of course, she was the Suffragist type, who is always offensive to men, on principle. He felt invigorated.

"A co-operative business," he murmured. Then went on: "Besides, it's not always an achievement to be proud of. Think of the Academy."

She dismissed the trivialities of the conversation with a sniff. Laddie wished Signor Francetti had admired Miss Carnforth's hair instead of Janet's, but as this was unfortunately not the case, he decided to enjoy the stimulus of a small encounter with his new acquaintance. He was really anxious to find a weak spot in her armour. He would try vanity, and drew a bow at a venture.

"Are you the Miss Carnforth who breaks windows?"

She tightened her lips a moment and looked full at him for the first time. Hitherto she had talked with a casual aloofness, which accentuated her

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lack of interest. When she replied, the defiance was in itself an answer.

"What if I am?"

Secretly delighted, Laddie simulated confusion :

"Oh—I—nothing, of course—I didn't mean to say anything to offend you——"

Again she walked into the trap.

"Offended!" she snorted. "I'm proud of it. I suppose you call it 'hooliganism'?"

"If I knew what hooliganism meant, perhaps I might. I thought it was merely a description of the other side."

"That is second-hand Delamotte."

And Laddie admitted she had scored.

"It is. I stand rebuked. But why don't you do something worth doing? Shoot someone, or blow up the House of Commons? It's not the foggiest use annoying drapers by breaking their windows."

"Oh, I can't argue it all with you. We aren't out to destroy life. Men do more than enough of that already."

The deadlock was obvious. Laddie felt suddenly and weakly bored. He wished frightfully Janet would come back.

"Can one get any food anywhere?"

Her scorn was too careless to be flattering.

"Downstairs, I believe," she said and turned and left him.

Hoping she would see him do so, Laddie deliberately walked away from the stairhead and

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leaned out of the landing window. But Miss Carnforth passed into the studio without another thought of him. She had routed doughtier opponents than Laddie, and he became one of a class for which she had no use—men who still believe themselves unbeaten. The other class, those who admitted themselves slaves, she despised but made use of. As yet, there was no third class.

Laddie's cigarette was half done before he heard voices behind him :

"Of course, dear, you must do as you wish. It has been delightful to have you. Eleven-thirty, is it ? Tell Sparkes to order the car."

Lady Finedon's words sent the cigarette a tiny meteor into the darkness below. Laddie turned quickly. But the glimpse of a slim, white dress, of an averted, golden head rapidly moving stair-wards, was all he saw of Janet. There was no time to wonder if this meant change of plan, for Lady Finedon was upon him. Her graciousness needed all a man's faculties of response. Doubtless the encounter was stimulating, but he could remember afterwards no incidents of the party subsequent to the vanishing of that shy and hurrying white-clad figure with the golden hair.

CHAPTER EIGHT

TWO mornings later he had forgotten all his fears. His high spirits were, as Dermot pointed out, exaggerated and offensive.

"Here am I," said Dermot, "sweating painfully to death—at breakfast too. Here are Miss Grogan's synthetic eggs (the process is something much more post-impressionist than mere *s* zamb-ling) sweating with equal anguish back to life again. And there are you, crowing like a cock and generally behaving as though you'd won an unexpected prize from *Tit-Bits*, just because you're going for a holiday. Good Lord—as if any blighter can't have a holiday!"

"Not the idle rich, old thing. Your style of life doesn't earn holidays. Delicious eggs!"

"Oh, do be quiet! You'll make me sick. You know perfectly well the eggs are vile. What's the matter with you?"

"I apologize. The thought of travelling by a train that ultimately goes to Heysham, whence boats ply between this tragic land and the Island of the Blessed is too much for me."

Luck was with him. He secured, by the greatest fluke, one of those sumptuous taxis with an

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electric light in the roof, only you can't ever find the switch, and curvy windows like old French first-class railway carriages, curtains with blobs round the edges and lots of room for your legs. Outstretched in this luxury he glided through the petrol-laden heat of Westbourne Grove towards St. Pancras.

It was certainly very hot indeed. The air, at definite spots, became almost solid with the smells that hung motionless, layer on layer, above the roadway. At the corner of Praed Street and the Edgware Road he laughed to think he was going straight to freedom instead of to the office. The sudden claim for a holiday had succeeded surprisingly. Probably its very suddenness had helped it. He chortled to himself. The furniture shop in Chapel Street, where they never had anything he wanted ; a glimpse of all those jolly little slums between Lisson Grove and the Edgware Road (streets of old, low houses, square as boxes, with black patches on the bricks representing the owners' shoulders on off-days) ; the sinister terrace of wrecked and abandoned houses near the underground station ; the generous loop of Park Crescent ; the litter of mason's yards after Trinity Church. Then the spacious wickedness of Euston Road. Magnificently London—those sour, secretive terraces with their "Bed and Breakfast"—as good an alliteration as "Roses and Rapture," anyway, and, under the circumstances, more accurate. Each landmark on the well-known route seemed intensified in its significance, more

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fascinating, more repellent, more tremendous, behind the dust-spangled veil of sweltering holiday.

He jumped from the taxi. With St. Pancras the secret was out. Now for the test. He crossed the booking-hall at a run; even the excruciating linenfold had no terrors to-day. The station-gulf was almost cool; Laddie scanned the platform eagerly. No. Well—it was early yet; she'd come all right. He bought a ticket and wondered who decided which coloured cardboard to use for which class. He even began evolving a scheme for syndicating artistic railway tickets—checks and stripes, landscapes showing the system's holiday resorts, portraits of the general managers. All this, avowedly, to kill time. He bought two papers he didn't want and wondered why he could never recall the paper he always meant to ask for next railway journey. The *Vanguard* gloomed dignified in the prominence its standing deserved.

"Lord," thought Laddie, "fancy paying sixpence for that!" But then he knew the contents too well and August is a poor time for weeklies which thrive on politics.

The train backed in. All the best seats seemed to be reserved beforehand. A low-down trick, probably the result of the postcard habit. Of course it wasn't possible that she had decided not to come. Only ten minutes more though. There were a lot of people travelling, principally babies.

"Thank God, I haven't got a baby! In this temperature! Steady on!" he admonished himself, for the thanksgiving had recalled, first Dermot's

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bassinette and then Janet, absurdly, rather offensively even. "Not the least offensively." He turned on himself, "Very much the reverse. If my baby was also Janet's baby I should travel all over the Sahara with it in the dry season followed by camels loaded with Thermos flasks to keep the milk hot——

"Yes—and take a perambulator too!" he added fiercely aloud, as a conveyance of the tribe grazed his leg. The porter in charge was too heated to retort; he spat expressively and passed on. Laddie sought his dining-car seat, let down the window and watched the entrance. He felt a gaping dread of her not coming. The glitter of the morning became a brassy glare. The dusky cavern of cool station air, an intolerable tank of raucous and sticky humanity. The train began to move. So she had gone yesterday after all; deliberately changed the day. Laddie sat ribbing with his finger-nails the pages of the novel he had brought; his forehead was wrinkled with the tiny frown that always cloaked his genuine disappointments. Why had she done this?

It must have been about Harpenden that he so far recovered as to abandon gloom in the abstract and return to rational thinking. And indeed it was deep gloom, however nebular, because he actually forgot to watch for the slanting glimpse of familiar houses, high above the railway line, that the devout servant of London can, by taking the psychological moment just before Kentish Town Station, win fleetingly even from a dining-

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car. At Harpenden, however, he asked himself what had happened. The data were scanty; limited in fact to his preposterous word-fencing with Janet herself and to Lady Finedon's remark to her niece :

"Of course, dear, you must do as you wish. It has been delightful to have you. Eleven-thirty, is it? Tell Sparkes to order the car."

Scanty certainly, but at least accurate so far as it went. As for explanations there was only one possible; he had concluded, without foundation, that Janet had been arranging her departure for the day she had appointed, for the day in fact on which he was travelling alone in this foul diner, with five hours' heat and wretchedness as a prelude to his holiday. Rotten absolutely. Anyway, if he had concluded anything he had concluded wrong. Janet was arranging something else, or she wasn't arranging anything, or it wasn't her at all, or—oh well, or any damn thing! What did he care? He was about fed up with girls, and she was like any other after all. Been sort of set off with the thunder probably. He seized his novel with a fierce determination to be interested. But he was not half-way down the first page before his mind refused attention and began, once again, shuttle-cocking wearily to and fro, the problem of why Janet had changed her plans.

The time dragged slowly on. Laddie decided the journey was the vilest he had ever taken. Certainly it was very hot; and the Midlands, dreary even in cool weather with their lumps of tiresome,

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county-family elms, with their foolish little hillocks, their occasional squalid cottages, their eternal field-advertisements glaring blatantly at the train, were to-day blazing purgatory.

"Why on earth," thought Laddie, bitterly "was Leicester ever allowed at all?"

He ate a petulant lunch, and the gingerbeer was flat.

"Serve me right for having such a fool drink," he said.

On the east of the line, just before Chesterfield, was a towering crane, a monster diagram, a figure of Euclid carried out in girders. This pleased Laddie immensely; life became tolerable again. It rose against a plain, corrugated shed, and, above the roof-tree of this, it seemed to spring like a bird with skeleton wings outstretched, towards the blazing hollow of the sky. From now on the country mattered more and more. The industrial element gradually pervaded the landscape. At first abrupt groups of cottages, queer, little, isolated gridirons of red brick streets thrown haphazard about the sudden, irrational slopes. Their roadways were trodden ash. The black barely outlasted the houses; it paled into freckled brown and grey; then vanished entirely in dust and ruts and scraggy grass. The gridirons grew larger. Long terraces of houses, sloping at wholly ridiculous angles up and down the hills, collided with other terraces, and the shock sent off splinters, other smaller rows, but no less reckless or unbending. Slim chimneys quivered through the heat.

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Slack heaps, with all the majesty and proportions of high mountains meticulously carried out in miniature ; furnaces whose fiery mouths were unconvincing as paint, so torrid already was the air ; writhing railway lines, cavernous sheds, viaducts, ever more cinder roads and cinder paths—one after another the banners of the West Riding were unfurled.

“Now at last,” thought Laddie, as he never failed to think, “it seems worth while to have left London.”

The orgy of grime and modern toil culminated at Leeds. The few minutes' halt Laddie spent on the platform, enjoying the shining serpents of the rails twisting into the station between giant factories and under bristling signal arches. The paving threw back heat to heat ; the sky was bronze on purple grey ; in Leeds smoke is not visible, for all the air is smoke. The Midland train lay like a tired, red worm, leaning against the platform edge. Its carriages seemed to sweat and steam after their exertions. Regretfully, when the whistle blew, he regained the fetid and untidy car.

After Leeds things changed. The hills were now definitely moors, but, at first, moors scarred with masonry, wounded by ceaseless tunnelling. Delicious spaces of clear, green grass separated town from town, factory from factory. The background became still more definitely moorland. Over the stern, grey hills, fearless ribbons of road went billowing. Finally, below the embankment, a grave, unvulgar town began quietly to collect.

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The train took a lofty curve; the traveller had a vision of a dark, grey church and the keep of a little castle, before his carriage, still on a curve, slowed suddenly and stopped.

The stop meant a change, a brief period of waiting, followed by a few miles' trundle in a local train, through the farmlands of the lower moors. Such male passengers as there were sat gaitered and taciturn, speaking rarely enough in deliberate musical voices of crops and cattle and mismanaged weather. The women had baskets—it was market-day in Skipton—and, with the vigour of their open-vowelled chatter, the jet or feathers in their bonnets bobbed and trembled to and fro.

The journey north ended for Laddie in a nine-mile drive. A country home with its distances and slow provisioning had forced the Canon to unwilling ownership of a motor-car, and this unappreciated vehicle was bubbling genially to itself in the roadway outside the little station at which Laddie alighted. A stout and sleepy-looking chauffeur was on the platform.

"No, Firkins, and never shall. I can't remember names as it is, and I should fail still more utterly at knobs and levers. The only excuse for motors and bicycles is to get you about; their mechanism is merely irritating."

The chauffeur shook his head sadly.

"It's a grand thing to drive a car. Mr. Robert now—Lootenant Robert, I should say—'e drives a car. Why shouldn't you, sir?"

"Oh, get on, Firkins, I want my tea."

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The motor slid between grey, stone walls, between grass edgings white with dust, along a winding road. A sharp descent and they were in Wharfedale, following the river-bed, which lay a field or two away to the right of them. Laddie lay back in the tonneau and smelt the moors. Every time they seemed more beautiful. On the east of the valley they were bare, with patches of rubble or even naked plaques of rock, the whole most curiously terraced and sprinkled with small, white houses, so that the hillside was more Italian than English. "A strange place," thought Laddie, "to look for Italy!"

On the west, however, the swelling heights of grey and green were not only English but immensely Yorkshire. For a mile or two they rolled back from the road, at once menacing and retreating. Then at a certain point above a tiny roadside village, they seemed to gather courage and, in a spasm of anger at the intrusions of the raucous traveller, to rush valleywards and hang suspended, a threatening pent-house of overhanging crag. From under the shadow of the cornice a spring dripped quietly, staining the rock with green. At the foot of the cliff a steep slope of grass, green and close-cropped as a lawn, fell to the road.

Certainly it was very beautiful. The association of ideas recalled Janet, who had for a while been forcibly banished as a subject of meditation. He lay back, pondering once more the fiasco of the journey that might have been, till Firkins, still brooding on Mr. Ian's lack of mechanical enter-

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prise, swished between the Canon's "neoliths" and pulled the car to a reproachful and sudden stop at the front door of the low grey house.

To the very threshold of his father's door Laddie had the full intention of extracting, either from the Canon himself or from Christine, such details of the family of Scarthdale as they could provide. The desire persisted even after their greetings were over and until the three were seated at the plain oak table on the verge of tea. Then, suddenly, all power to utter Janet's name, even to mention her parents, her house, the valley in which she lived, deserted him. Time and again he summoned courage to begin; time and again he was checked, stuttering and idiotic, on the very brink of his remark, dominated by this absurd and irritating helplessness.

The father was surprised at the half-witted obtuseness of his usually intelligent son. That the boy was in no mood to discuss anything so important as the house or the furniture was clear enough. Canon Macallister turned to his daughter:

"Sir Purdon is home. I saw him up the valley this morning—with that girl of his, what's her name?"

"Janet?" asked Christine. "——Ian, what are you doing?"

"Fearfully sorry, old thing!" Laddie was extravagantly excited. "My elbow fused. Does tea hurt the table? I say, I have made a mess. Too disgusting!"

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He mopped the spilt tea busily, while Christine, after a look of mild astonishment at this sudden exuberance, turned once more to her father.

"Janet, do you mean?" she repeated.

"Yes, that's it, Janet. Nice-looking girl. The Stonecliffe 'season' may be said to have begun. We are to lunch there to-morrow."

After a wild moment of delight at this providential invitation, Laddie fell to somewhat uneasy rumination. He hadn't bargained for a baronet—(must be a baronet—nothing so ephemeral as a knight would live in this remote and ancient place)—and he had a nervous dislike of pompous and insignificant dynasties, with their traditions and their prejudice. He abandoned any plan of enquiry from his father, threw off his vague absorption and followed Christine into the garden.

They examined the tennis lawn and Christine reminded him that this was Yorkshire not Buckinghamshire, that the lawn was barely six months old, that he was ungrateful and unreasonable.

"Besides which," she concluded, "I don't know who's going to use it. You're never here and father hardly ever plays now. So what does it matter?"

They examined the hens and the orchard and the herbaceous border ("Bordering on the herbaceous," commented Laddie generously) and the Alpine plants among the stones and the new paved garden by the study window and the black traces of Firkins and his motor on the drive. The tour of inspection over, they sat on a broad stone slab let

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into a bastion of the terrace wall, and looked westward over the tops of the trees to the distant moors, golden green in the setting sun.

It was profoundly silent. Along one level ray that struck clear through the thickets and splashed its yellow stain upon the greyness of the ancient wall, Laddie's thoughts travelled, as on a bridge of faery, over the darkling garden to the velvet hills, among the folds of which, guarded by a dragon-baronet and hedged about with all the panoply of caste, was Janet.

CHAPTER NINE

I

IN England the family, like the individual mind, achieves virtue by staying as long as possible in the same spot. Sir Purdon Tring—if not quite so great a personage as he imagined—had at least this merit of long-standing immobility. His ancestors had lived in Scarthdale for three hundred years, and if any one of them ever gave vent to an original idea, history has forgotten it. Perhaps that is hardly fair to the first baronet, who cheerfully sacrificed quite a number of his peasantry at Marston Moor, winning a title from the gratified Rupert before the full tragedy of the Royalist defeat had dawned on that impetuous leader. True, there is no record of this unofficial honour ever having been confirmed by the King, but Charles had a lot to think of and the recipient's cautious withdrawal to the moors, and subsequent skilful conversion, first to Oliver Cromwell and then to Charles II, obliterated any trace of irregularity and made easy the, so to speak, posthumous formalities at the Restoration Court. Before the gallant gentleman died in 1669, the baronetcy was well established and his descendants had been,

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since that date, very much the local aristocrats in the lonely region where they dwelt.

With, however, this possible exception, the Tring family had ever walked in harmony with their times. Sir Matthew, who made a fortune (badly needed) in the Industrial Revolution by compelling women and children to work overtime in an insanitary mill near Batley, was able to conform to the best conventions and, at the same time, slightly to outstrip his competitors, by leaving all pioneer work to a consumptive cousin. This unfortunate, having launched the business with acumen and foresight, died suddenly from a hæmorrhage, brought on no doubt by his exertions. The organization, with managers and hands, ran itself, until the owner accepted an advantageous offer to sell and devoted himself and his wealth to living as a gentleman should.

The Trings, perhaps from their very conventionality, never produced an heir who was a rake. Consequently the financial resources of Sir Purdon were ample for his mode of life. This consisted of living most of the year in Scarthdale House (a square pseudo-classical building erected by Sir Matthew on the site of the rambling and despised manor-house which had existed since the days of Elizabeth), shooting, dog-breeding, and rent-collecting, the monotony varied by journeys to London or to other parts of England and (but this rarely, for, as everyone knows, foreigners are a low lot) occasional trips abroad.

He had two brothers, one a brigadier whose sub-

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ordinates prayed that peace would be preserved at any rate at present, the other a clergyman with a comfortable Canonry in the South. The present Lady Tring was a second wife. Her predecessor so far forgot her duty as to provide Sir Purdon with one daughter but no son. This unheard-of omission reconciled the family to her death after five years of married life. Also—they had never been quite at home with poor Diana; she had strange ideas; one never knew what she would say next; odd that Purdon ever married her at all. Now dear Clara was so different—so dependable.

In some such strain, the Tring relations.

Sir Purdon himself mourned Diana with the stodgy idealism of his nature. He had been captivated by her delicate and golden beauty, while she, daughter of a good but impoverished family, had accepted her honest, handsome lover not wholly in deference to the wishes of her parents. Now that she was dead, she stood in Sir Purdon's mind for the riot and romance of youth, as a memory to be cherished, but only as a memory. The family required an heir and an heir required a second marriage. The daughter of a neighbouring landowner was sensible and healthy, Sir Purdon's wild days were over, and a new Lady Tring kindly, unimaginative and devoted to her lord, was in due time installed at Scarthdale House.

Janet, who was young when her mother died, lived through the three years of her father's

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widowerhood in charge of those admirable servants which seem obtainable only by folk who cannot appreciate their virtues and their rarity. The Servant Problem had no terrors for Sir Purdon, and, despite the remoteness of Scarthdale, his household pursued its even way. Towards the motherless child the father showed a genial but slightly embarrassed friendliness. He made no effort to understand the little girl's wayward gaiety, her fits of seemingly contemptuous revolt. He patted her head in the morning, kissed the air a few inches from her nose in the evening, and, if he saw her during the daytime at all, confined his remarks to—"And what are *you* up to?" "You seem a very busy little lady!" and similar inanities.

It was her stepmother who really took Janet in hand, sending her to a boarding-school and then to Brussels and welcoming her home, as a more or less permanent element at Scarthdale, when she reached her eighteenth year.

Lady Tring had not failed in her own duty and gave birth to twin boys in the second year of her marriage. That essential accomplished, she settled down quietly to share her husband's life and respect the prejudices of his relations. She was unfailingly kind to Janet and strove hard to cure a certain independence of outlook and directness of speech, which, due doubtless to education away from home and to the inevitable influence of heredity, would, if unbridled, pain perhaps and certainly puzzle Sir Purdon.

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Janet had her mother's wit and power of criticism but also her mother's adaptability. She accepted loyally the conventions of her father and his friends, only allowing herself to wonder vaguely whether life was really quite so simple as the Scarthdale attitude implied. She would occasionally tease her stepmother by a sudden phase of challenge, a half-checked movement of rebellion, and chuckle inwardly at the good lady's alarm and counter-argument. Particularly did the girl's periodical visits to her mother's sister provide bases for these bouts of difference. Lady Finedon talked of causes and read papers undreamt of in Scarthdale, and was at times guilty of deliberate attempts to guide her niece along paths certain to be regarded by Sir Purdon as undesirable for anyone and positively dangerous for a young girl.

Enough has been said of Lady Finedon to show that she was one of those foolish-clever women, who mistake dabbling for culture. Her rapid mind could grasp and whole-heartedly pursue one theory after another, with an appearance of absorption and an effect of sympathetic profundity. She affected a working knowledge of music, painting, literature, women's suffrage, trade unionism, Tariff Reform, theosophy, Dalcroze Eurythmics and the thousand kaleidoscopic interests of the modern intellectual. She was never at a loss. She never said Marchand for Marquet, or Sjöström for Sibelius. It was inevitable that contact with such a mind should prove disturbing to anyone with little experience but great powers of partisan-

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ship, and above all to anyone who, from interest in a particular subject, passed to the logical desire to know and to understand.

But the very volatility of her aunt's nature checked Janet in her political and artistic education. She would try to carry forward from one visit to another some subject which attracted her, only to find that the intervening months had driven the cause from Lady Finedon's head and that penultimate interests are of all bores the deadliest. As a result, the girl's knowledge of revolt was scrappy and unsustained. Scarthdale with its peace and loneliness would flow once more like a welcome tide over the sands that had for a time been exposed to the glare and winds of Campden Hill. Tired with London—the noise, the endless visitors, her aunt's emotional eloquence—Janet would, each time she reached home again, slip back with utter relief into country sounds and country thoughts, until they in their turn began once more to cloy and their placid acquiescence to assume the futility of stagnation.

II

It was Laddie's misfortune that his first meeting with Janet fell at the junction of the two conflicting moods. Chance brought them together at the end of an unusually stimulating course of London modernity. Their bizarre conversation, against the livid background of thunder and driving rain,

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was the last flicker of Janet's receptive vitality. She talked then with an elusive rapidity wholly foreign to her normal manner. The wave of inevitable fatigue had broken over her at the precise moment when Lady Finedon dragged her to the altar of Francetti's admiration. She had stood before London's colour-craze and listened, as in a dream, to his elaborate and unconvincing compliments. Her body ached for quiet, her mind for slow simplicity. And it was, therefore, a profound impulse, both of body and of mind, that forced a hasty change of plans and accelerated by a day the flight to Yorkshire.

All of which was, naturally, hidden from her lover, who found out quickly enough that something was amiss, but, for all his brain cudgelling could not determine what.

.

The long lunch table, littered with crumbled bread, with petals fallen from the roses, glowed in the hot shade of the sun-blinds. Laddie played disconsolately with his cheese-knife, mixing an uneasy mortar of butter, salt and Camembert. What was happening? Why was everything blank and unresponsive? There was Janet next him—actually sitting in the chair next his; Lady Tring, burbling gently beyond the rose bowl; Sir Purdon, mopping his brow and drinking whiskey; the twins, shrill and literal, with all the misplaced eagerness of eleven years; Mrs. What's-her-name from over the moor—too much motor veil, or was

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it her hair that floated so bemusingly? Christine; the Reverend . . . They were all there, all apparently flesh and blood. And yet there was no vitality, no breath, in the languid air of this summer dining-room. . . . The women rose. Janet rose. He watched her body swing in its thin white blouse and plain white skirt. What nice legs she had. Short skirts were a good invention. Everyone rose. The twins tugged his arms . . . guinea pigs was it? . . . or rats in the barn? He was led away, sweating and perplexed, but outwardly benevolent.

Eventually tennis—after an early tea, when the shadow of the great elms was dappling the lawn to gold and green. A young man appeared from somewhere—presumably brought by a motor-bicycle. He was tanned and stocky and his short, fair moustache neither added to nor detracted from the complacent good temper of his face. He played with Christine: Janet with Laddie. It was a terrible game, with the *stimmung* of Hunt Balls, Kitchen Lancers, and the Horse Show at Olympia. The young man was a bad player; Janet was a bad player. But neither minded; they despised the game and only played to pass the time. Laddie, as ever susceptible to the attraction of inferiority, went from bad to worse. His drives went out, his half-volleys “yorked” and stuck. The more he tried, the worse he played. And still neither the young man nor Janet minded. They seemed to notice nothing. The set over, the players wandered listlessly towards the

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house—Janet and the young man, Laddie and Christine.

“I’m going,” said Laddie irritably.

“I should,” replied his sister.

But when he glanced at her suspiciously he only saw, as ever, her placid eyes and gentle, unsarcastic mouth. . . .

III

He sat at his bedroom window late that night, watching his pipe-smoke film the moon and melt into the untroubled dark. His mind was sluggishly confused. From the very first it had been wrong. And he had worded his greeting so well :

“I suppose I deserved it,” he had said, with that rather pathetic hint of smile that strangers sometimes took for a sneer. “I made it almost inevitable for you to change the day. . . .”

She might have been someone altogether else. Only that maddening wrinkle of the nose had proved the identity. She merely looked at him, puzzled.

“ . . . Change the day . . . ? ”

Good Lord, had she forgotten ? The thought of explanation choked him. He laughed with intentional bitterness and turned the subject.

It had been just the same all day. Each reference to that electric night met with an indifference that was barely civil. And yet the baldest, starkest jokes had made her laugh. The woman with the

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veil prattled at lunch about her Pekinese and Janet chorused eager questions and applause. The strange young man had her intent in twenty words on some paralysing problem of sheep-dipping or rabbit-wiring. Where had she gone? Her beautiful shell was there but nothing else. It was awful. It was worse than awful, because it just put out the light. Nothing was any good any more. Sick with disappointment and wounded vanity he went to bed. But with sleep came brilliant dreams of a golden maid, vibrant with life and loveliness, poised against a rising sun on a tower of fretted ivory. He awoke suddenly excited.

"I love her!" he thought exultantly. "I worship the very grains of dust she breathes. . . ."

Next moment, however, from the crest of this splendid wave, he sank to a trough of anger and disgust.

"I cannot love her, for she is not there. Only her body is there, white and slim and cool. . . . This is lust not love . . . lust not love . . . lust not love. . . ."

And he dozed into the weary to and fro of actual and ideal, the purgatory of the fastidious sensualist.

IV

They met next day in the village. She was getting off her bicycle as he emerged from the post-office, carrying stamps and post-cards and an

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open telegram. He felt tired and rather interesting. She was clean and fresh and vilely undisturbed.

"Good morning. Are you also buying stamps? My brother is coming for a day or two."

She acknowledged the greeting with a smile so placid, that her very tears had been less hopelessly repressive.

"Your brother? I didn't know you had one. Is he older than you?"

Really, thought Laddie, she's getting positively maternal. Older than me, indeed! But he looked at her, his grave dark eyes deliberately appealing, and replied:

"Younger. He's a soldier. You'll like him."

"All the better," she replied and, with a friendly bow, passed into the post-office.

Her utter lack of curiosity, of responsiveness was little short of anguish to Laddie, as he walked slowly home. An instinct had warned him against any reference to the lunch or tennis of the preceding day. She had no interest in such reminiscence; the continuity of their acquaintance (for him so precious and vital a study) for her did not exist; he was an incident that had recurred, that was all. She *would* like Robert; no doubt about it. Supposing—supposing Robert liked her. . . . He set his thin contemptuous lips into a bitter line. All the self-critical pride of his nature rose at the infamous thought of jealousy. Jealous of Robert! What was he, compared to Robert? A tissue of selfish nerves, beside a man with a man's tastes

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and a man's accomplishments. Robert would swirl her about the country in the car; Robert would fish, shoot rabbits, bully the peasantry; Robert would never go prying into churches, poring over pew ends, examining ancient glass; Robert would talk no showy nonsense nor play tennis with the finish of a suburban champion; Robert would damn Trade Unions, suffragettes, Irishmen, with all the unthinking, unmalicious heartiness of the healthy, simple animal he was. With his soul black under the shadow of renunciation, Laddie spent the remainder of the morning toiling at a loose stone wall, the gaps in which needed laborious repair.

At lunch the Canon was conversational. He would panel the ante-hall; the bits of screen would put together well and show, through graceful lancets, the main hall with its towering chimney breast and cross-beamed roof. He went on to develop plans for beautifying the village church. Christine recommended the instant removal thither of a litter of carved fragments that, at present, lay about the house and gave the maids excuse for never dusting. Laddie protested. The argument continued after lunch till distant snorts sent Christine to her feet.

"Robert!" she cried, and flew towards the front.

The new arrival was very hot and said so.

"Bath first, me dear, and then all the kissing you require. Hullo, Laddie, didn't know you were here. Chin chin, pater, how's the cure of souls?"

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Laddie accompanied his brother upstairs and watched him strew his clothes about the floor. He studied, deliberately, Robert's fine physique and probed his inmost being for a trace of jealousy. Was it jealousy that now connected Janet with this cheerful nakedness? Robert stooped and ran his hands up from the ankles, over the hairy legs and firm, nervous thighs to the upper breasts.

"Muller exercises," he commented. "Loot. Muller (Royal Danish Navy), the world's greatest benefactor. Do you Mull?"

Laddie shook his head and laughed.

"I tried once, but it takes too long and I always stubbed my toe on the chest of drawers in that kicking one. A book by de Selinecourt put me on to it."

"Not knowing the lady," replied his brother, "I cannot vouch for the morality of the motive. I shall now bathe."

He returned in ten minutes, trailing water behind him. From the depths of a head towel his voice reached Laddie in muffled jerks.

"Well, what kind of a hole has the pater got hold of here? Anything to do. Nice girls or chance of killin' things?"

"I should imagine plenty, killing things I mean. As for girls I've only been here two days so I am hardly an expert."

"Come off it, you hypocrite!" cried Robert delightedly. "You don't expect me to believe *that*—you, with your marionettes or whatever they were in gay Paree and ardent young poetesses

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in London. Trust you to sniff the little darlings out in well under two days. Confess, you have seen a girl."

Laddie was forced to admit that he had, and his brother was so pleased at this exposure of duplicity and fraud that he quite forgot to ask for further particulars.

But the test came at dinner. Robert had taken his two-seater down the valley to Scarthwell for some slight repair. Suddenly, as pudding was giving way to fruit, he looked across at Laddie and remarked solemnly :

"My boy, I saw this afternoon the most beautiful girl I ever set eyes on."

It was cruelly unexpected and there was a moment of silence. Perhaps the fact that Christine did not at once cry out at Robert's foolishness impelled Laddie to glance towards his sister. He found her quiet eyes were fixed, not on Robert but on himself. He rallied his composure.

"Oh, no, John, no, John, no, John, no-o-o!" he chanted flippantly.

But Robert regarded him gravely.

"Lovely. With golden hair and ruby lips and . . ."

"Robert!" said the Canon. "You insult my years. I didn't know the army was so lyrical. Where was this nymph and who?"

"In a dog-cart—quite near here. I don't know who she was. That's your job."

"She sounds like——" The Canon broke off short at the crash of glass. Christine had knocked

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her finger-bowl with a decanter and the cloth was sodden with spilt water and powdered with fragments of the shattered glass.

"I'm so sorry!" she murmured confusedly. "I don't know how I came to be so clumsy. It's a lucky thing, at least, that it wasn't one of the good ones. . . ."

.

On her way to bed that night she was met by Laddie on the stairs. He took her affectionately by the shoulders.

"You're a brick, Christine," he said, "a real brick."

She kissed him on the forehead, smoothing his hair with her hand.

"Poor old boy," she whispered.

V

Janet's indifference was not assumed. At no time much interested in people as apart from things, her mood of reaction from town to country intensified a natural preoccupation with animals, trees and practical achievement and let pass almost unnoticed the various personalities with whom chance brought her into contact. Further, she was consistent in that she did not judge her acquaintances or even her surroundings in relation to herself. Her own psychology—how far it affected and was

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affected by that of other people—troubled her not at all. She met Laddie, therefore, for the second time, as though it were the first. Their previous acquaintance—to him at the time so full of possibility and now fraught with such eager memory—belonged to an earlier and vanished epoch of her impersonal and assimilative life and, as such, was, according to her calm, receptive custom, temporarily put aside. Not forgotten—for in feeling she was tenacious as she was undemonstrative, from time to time recreating some past experience with a freshness of emotion impossible to a nature that exhausts, by a too fierce enjoyment, each phase as it goes by—but inoperative at the moment as stimulus or influence. Laddie's reference to her earlier home-coming was therefore genuinely unmeaning. At the time of their first conversation she had not intended giving him the slip. Nor was it in any way subsequent shyness that had prompted the change of day. So far as she was normal enough consciously to anticipate anything at all, she had welcomed the prospect of his company in the train. The alteration in her plan came automatically with the alteration in herself. At the moment of that transformation she had realized that she longed for home, and determined therefore to leave London at the earliest possible moment.

That Laddie was in love with her never entered her head. He was polite and looked her in the eyes, but most young men she met were similar, and her own candid directness of mind withered

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any tendency to philandering, where such existed. She was always so plainly one of four or five or six and never one of two.

And so it came about that, while her lover wondered and argued with himself and wondered again what he had done or what uncanny process had substituted Sir Purdon's daughter for Lady Finedon's niece, she went her way happily and undisturbed, considering him only when he was present and then in no special connection, but merely as one unit in the same crowd as herself. It was not until, his holiday done, he had gone miserably back to work and London, that his personality began to occupy her mind at all.

A month of Scarthdale soothed the unease of Finedon over-stimulus and Janet unconsciously began once more to absorb and criticize the atmosphere of home. The twins had gone to an uncle for the rest of the summer holidays and she was left alone with Sir Purdon and her stepmother. Conversation one evening turned on village politics and Lady Tring mentioned a rumour that Canon Macallister was forming a club, in which the rustics could meet each other and occasionally discuss matters of a wider interest than those of their own confined existence.

"Macallister is a good chap and a clever chap," said Sir Purdon, "but he doesn't understand agricultural labourers. They're fools and they always will be, but they are cunning enough to pick up catchwords and fancy themselves unfairly used. If there is any political talk in this club I must see

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into the matter. I won't have a lot of demagogues shrieking their pernicious rubbish about my farms ! ”

“ Well, dear,” replied his wife placidly, “ I'm sure I haven't heard that anything of the kind is likely to happen. Why should you think the Canon intends such a thing ? ”

“ I didn't accuse him of intending it, Clara,” said Sir Purdon testily. “ You jump to conclusions so. But with one of his sons a Socialist scribbler, it's quite conceivable.”

“ Has he a son who scribbles Socialism, father ? ” asked Janet.

“ Yes, my dear, he has. The young man came here several times—a dark, mysterious, shifty sort of fellow, who talks too much.”

“ Shifty, father ? He seemed to me unusually definite when he did express an opinion. But how do you know he's a Socialist ? ”

“ He is employed by a Radical rag called the *Vanguard*—a paper that preaches red revolution. That fact appears to me ample evidence of his political opinions.”

Janet knew nothing of the *Vanguard*, except that it lay about on tables at the Dark Tower, and she therefore judged it discreet to drop the subject. Her father, uneasily fearful of further catechism, was equally inclined to a change of conversation. His own knowledge of the *Vanguard* would not bear close investigation, being limited to such extracts from its columns as were from time to time subjected, in the *Morning Post*, to vitupera-

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tive attack and, in the *Yorkshire Post*, to grieved, avuncular reproof.

"There's another baby at Myers'," said Janet suddenly.

"Dear me," murmured Lady Tring, "doesn't that make nine? It seems a lot—and in that tumbledown old place. . . ."

"I don't know what you mean by 'tumbledown,' my dear Clara," observed Sir Purdon. "The house is an old one and time will leave his marks, you know. But in the hands of reasonably careful folk there are years of wear in it. Of course neither I nor anyone can guarantee a house against a horde of destructive children. If folks prefer to be improvident, they must take the consequences."

"Why is it improvident to have nine children, father?"

Sir Purdon glanced over his spectacles at his daughter:

"What is the matter with you to-night, Janet? You do nothing but ask silly questions. It seems a simple argument that to bring into the world more mouths than one can afford to support is improvident."

"But perhaps they can afford it."

"Of course they can't, my dear. I suppose I ought to know what my own farms are worth?"

It was instinct this time that impelled Janet to a further change of subject. She had a sudden inkling that it would, obscurely, be unkind to Myers to repeat what she had heard in the village, that he had, with the help of his eldest son, been

doing very well with pigs. The relations between her father and his tenants (Sir Purdon employed no agent in the ordinary sense) were unknown to her, but a scrap of talk, overheard on the village green some months ago, came into her mind. The subject was apparently some new dairy appliance, saving of labour and productive of profit.

"What's t' good of thaat—to have it screwed owt of ma pocket int' t'squires? Noa, lad, reckun ah knaw tomfoolery when ah see'd it. . . ."

She got up and, crossing to the open window, went out into the silvery silence of the moonlit garden.

When the girl had disappeared, Lady Tring reverted, rather timidly, to the subject of the village club.

"I hope, Purdon, you won't speak to the Canon about his club until you see what is really going to happen. I don't think he'd like it very much—and after all . . ."

She checked herself and for a moment stitched in silence. Unfortunately her husband had, for once, been listening to what she said.

"After all . . . Clara?"

Lady Tring shook herself, a little nervously:

"Well, dear, what I mean is that we can't very well prevent him doing it, can we?—and it seems wiser not to—well, not to have unnecessary—disagreement. Besides he is doing a great deal for the village (think of the difference from poor Mr. Tasker!) and I suppose anything that improves the place generally is a good thing . . .?"

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"I am not a fool," the baronet replied, "and I do not recall ever saying that I proposed to interfere with Macallister at all. Also I am aware that he is doing his best by the village, and, as I said, that he is a clever and honourable man. In principle, however, I disapprove of undue education for those whose livelihood is not won by use of the brain, and—however little I may be able to prevent the Canon doing what he likes—I can and will prevent my tenants acting contrary to my wishes."

"I was only suggesting waiting a little, Purdon. . . ."

"The suggestion was unnecessary. I shall do nothing rash. I was, however, surprised to see the familiarity with which Macallister was treated by his eldest son and the apparent agreement shown by the father in some of the young man's foolish and extreme remarks."

"I think you attach too much importance to that boy. Why should you think the Canon is influenced more by his elder than his younger son for instance?—or perhaps that would be equally unfortunate . . . ?"

"The younger son, Clara, is an officer." Sir Purdon did not add "and a gentleman"; his tone made such an addition superfluous.

Janet appeared at the window.

"I'm going to bed, dears," she announced. "Good night to you."

That evening had brought her to the opening of a phase, through which nearly every generous boy or girl must pass, and out of which some never

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emerge until their deaths—the phase of theoretical sympathy with the “have nots” in their struggle with the “haves.” It was the merest chance that associated Laddie in her mind with the first step into this ardent period of sentimental Socialism, but chance is a more potent influence than many another and certainly he, had he known of it, would not have quarrelled with the fate that not only transformed him in Janet’s eyes from a mere encounter into a definite personality, but even invested him with some of the glamour of a fine ideal.

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It fell to Christine to inaugurate the next stage in the intimacy of her brother and Janet. The girls met at a garden party in Wharfedale, three weeks after Laddie’s return to town.

“I’m so glad you are here, Janet. I have been trying to get up to Scarthdale for several days. I thought you might like to see those snapshots I took the day we had lunch on the fells—you remember, when my brothers were here?”

Janet took the photographs with interest. There was the whole party—a smiling row, just after lunch. Another group—absurdly posed to suggest dangerous rock-climbing. The Canon and old Mr. Shawcross, with pipes and large felt hats; Laddie and Robert, bare-headed with cigarettes; Lady Tring knitting; dogs alone; unwilling dogs being held by Harry Shawcross; one or two views of fell and valley. Not more than ten altogether. Janet counted surreptitiously. Only ten.

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“ Are these all ? ” she asked innocently. “ They are very good.”

“ No—my brother kept two. I sent them to him to look at.”

It was cleverly done, and Christine was all simple gentleness. Janet gave back the photographs with expressions of pleasure, asked for a print of one of the groups and changed the subject. But when she was driving home alone she found herself wondering which brother it was to whom the photographs had been sent, especially as, of the missing two, one was of herself, alone on a solitary rock. This she was sure of ; she remembered how sharp the rock had been to sit on. What was the other ? Suddenly it came back to her, and the riddle of the brothers was solved. For the other picture was of Robert and men do not collect photographs of themselves.

CHAPTER TEN

I

DISCONSOLATE and irritable, Laddie took up once more, at Vanguard House, the threads of work. Although he would not admit it, the wound he had received was to his vanity. He told himself he had misread Janet's character, but what he meant was that she had disappointed him. He was not unduly conceited, but to see his proffered adoration not rejected but worse than rejected, blandly and amiably ignored, was a serious mortification. Well aware of his own hypercritical fastidiousness, he considered, reasonably enough, that his love, especially a love so suddenly and romantically conceived, was a rarer and more precious gift than the love of a man the standard of whose tastes is easily attained. This love had never been bestowed before, and, apart from the personality of the giver, it proved the recipient to have fulfilled a lofty and scrupulously strict ideal. But even this tribute Janet had chosen to let pass without acknowledgment. At this point his sense of justice would assert itself and remind him that, having no means whatever of distinguishing him from the veriest libertine,

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she did not and could not realize the compliment paid to her.

He was so utterly astray about it all. He knew Janet had no interest in, much less affection for, him. What he did not know was that she was ignorant even of having excited admiration. He would recall the night of Lady Finedon's crush. It was not true to say that Janet had encouraged him. She had not done that exactly. But she had undoubtedly played to his lead, and, by all conventions of modern manners, in such a way as to make him lead again. He had led again and had been met by assumed uncomprehension. It wasn't fair.

"And yet she can't be a flirt," he thought, "not with those eyes, those candid, friendly eyes."

Then what the devil had happened? Full circle: he was back again at the beginning.

That he had ever been jealous of Robert seemed now a subject for somewhat shamefaced amusement. When his brother and Janet made mutual acquaintance (the day after Christine broke her finger bowl), the folly of the idea was manifest. Robert, as always with girls, was hearty and gallant, full of exuberant talk and brisk, transparent compliment. Janet laughed and joked as she laughed and joked with everyone. Both were entirely natural, entirely surface-merry. When he got home Robert said she was a dam pretty kid with a rippin' skin. When she got home, Janet said he was an amusing boy but rather exhausting. And there the matter ended.

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Laddie's mood almost of embitterment with Janet lasted until the packet of twelve snapshots arrived from Christine. Then the sight of her, perched on a rock with her short skirt driven by the moorland wind and her arms about her knees, roused in him such a sudden storm of longing that all self-excuse, all self-pity were swept away on the tide of a new and passionate purpose. He cursed himself for a faint heart and came almost to welcome his mistress' unresponse as an obstacle that he, in her honour, must surmount. Guessing that Christine's object in sending the photographs was something beyond mere holiday reminiscence, he abstracted the picture of Janet. He also appropriated one of his brother which took his fancy. The other ten went back to Yorkshire.

II

The first noticeable effect of what may be termed the "knight-errant attitude," to which Laddie was brought by Christine's snapshot, was not wholly a welcome one. He found his perceptions of the women around him quickened to a curious and somewhat disquieting degree. Before he met Janet at all, he had sought to lose himself in London, deliberately isolating the city from its human element. Janet came and filled him with a new and overpowering interest, but an interest, at first, deeply tinged with egoism. He saw her

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vis-à-vis with himself; he liked to consider the two of them—himself and her—as inhabiting a faery world apart, divided by the web of their mutual absorption from the brutish unelect. This dream of selfish unreality Janet herself had shattered. Its flimsy fabric crumbled at the first contact with her keen, non-introspective mind. In its place came a mood, less coherent, but infinitely less fantastic. Janet was no longer woman; she became one of a million women, and the path to her attainment lay, not through a magic world of which he alone possessed the key, but along trodden ways in company with a multitude, many of whom were her potential lovers. Obviously the companions of his route claimed keen attention. Human no less than Janet, they merited respectful study. The women especially were fascinating problems. He had thought to understand a girl, because he loved her. He now realized the ancient truth that love comes through understanding.

It was inevitable that, with egoism, should vanish some measure of the restraint that egoism imposes. The fastidious are always self-centred, and Laddie, as has been shown, was not ashamed of his fastidiousness. Now that self no longer held the stage, the manifold interests of daily life were greeted with a pleasurable zest they had not previously called forth.

The *Vanguard*, among its unconventionalities, numbered a woman critic of art. Pamela Cartmel was a widow of thirty-five. Her husband had been a painter, and the ten years of their married life

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had passed in France, Germany, Italy and Chelsea surrounded by pictures and by picture makers. When David Cartmel died, his widow was not content to live idly on the sufficient income she possessed and her friends in the art world brought to the notice of Postlethwaite the young woman's extensive knowledge of painters and of their trade. Postlethwaite had no use for pictures himself, but his very contempt for them inclined him to welcome a woman critic, who would supply a degenerate section of the public with the commentary it required without causing the disgrace to his staff that would attend the engagement of a male æsthete. Mrs. Cartmel had accordingly joined the *Vanguard* a few months before Laddie's appearance, and few days passed without her coming to Golden Square on some pretext or another.

She first made Laddie's acquaintance over the reviewing of a large book about Rodin, whom she had known personally, and thereafter paid occasional brief visits to his room for a few minutes' talk. Not, however, until his return from Yorkshire and his period of bad temper, did he realize the growing frequency of these visits. Indeed the recurrence of that finger-knock, followed by the low, strong voice—"Very busy, Mr. Macallister?"—became, in his dejection, an intolerable annoyance. He was cross and almost rude. Nevertheless, the morning after Janet's photograph had come, when he heard the fingers play their rapid tune upon the door, it was with distinct pleasure that he called "Come in!"

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Mrs. Cartmel showed no sense of his altered manner. They fell into discussion over the Pointillists.

The clock on Laddie's mantelpiece struck one. "I'd no idea it was so late," he said. "Let's go and lunch. I'm sure you're wrong about Seurat ; he's a second-rater."

She accompanied him downstairs.

"You should have known him. How that man worked ! And the thought in it all. No—you are unjust. I don't maintain he was a great painter, but he had at least a reason for all he did and it is not everyone that has that."

Over lunch they talked at random. She insisted on drinking Marsala.

"Deplorable taste, I know. But I live by memory. David and I drank Marsala on our honeymoon—at Carcassonne. And now I can see again the moonlight and the slumbering, mediæval stones. . . . We drank it one dazzling moon at Cadenabbia—on a terrace over the lake, with the towers of Bellagio opposite, white against those blue, Italian hills. . . ."

She looked at him over her poised glass and her long, brown eyes with their straight brows and the broad, low forehead, white under the coil of hair, hung as it were in mid-air over the tawny, golden wine. Idly he wondered why, in view of such intimate reminiscence, they drank Marsala now.

He heard behind him the steps of new-comers, threading their way between the tables of the

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restaurant. Pamela Cartmel looked up incuriously. Then she smiled.

"My dear Barbara, fancy seeing you! It's ages since we met. . . ."

Someone was standing by his side, but he kept his eyes lowered in that slight embarrassment always caused by greetings between a companion and a stranger. A voice replied, a firm, hard voice:

"I've been in prison, Pamela, and my social activities were accordingly curtailed."

"Mr. Macallister, may I introduce you? Miss Carnforth. . . ."

Laddie stood up and bowed.

"How do you do? I believe we met this summer—at Lady Finedon's."

Barbara Carnforth looked at him a moment, as they shook hands.

"So we did. We quarrelled about window-breaking I think. Well—I wasn't convinced. I've only just come out."

He laughed. After a few more words with Mrs. Cartmel, the militant followed the two girls with whom she had come in.

"Curious you should have met before. What crazy heroines they are! Do you very strongly disapprove?"

"Not in the least. Why should I? I think I only asked how it helped, to annoy harmless tradespeople. But Miss Carnforth thirsts for battle, even in conversation."

Mrs. Cartmel smiled slowly.

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"All women thirst for battle, one way or another—with men."

And through the cigarette-smoke he saw her long, brown eyes lazily fixed on his,

III

The events of this lunch set him thinking. Considered in conjunction with what had gone before and with the increasing intimacy that followed—an intimacy at each stage of which she seemed, on reflection, to take the initiative—her behaviour allowed only of one explanation. She was, as Robert would say, "asking for it." The idea flattered but at the same time obscurely alarmed him. Often, when reading books in which the love impulse had come from the woman, he had wondered how frequently such a thing really happened and what it felt like. Now it had happened to himself—or was in a fair way to do so. His feeling toward Mrs. Cartmel herself was baffling. He admired her as a handsome woman and as excellent, amusing company. She was always, however, subtly "older" than himself, and this with no reference to the handful of years that separated their ages, but in outlook and manipulation of life. Consequently there seemed something almost repellent in the idea of her making love to him; he would be shown up for, relatively speaking, the callow boy he was and his carefully studied sophis-

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tication of talk and mannerism would only underline the raw reality. But undeniably it was exciting. He decided to drift a little and see how things developed.

For a time nothing particular occurred. Pamela and he lunched together, visited an occasional show, exchanged the commonplaces of a mutual "shop." She was vivacious and self-possessed; he, nervously on the look-out for any indication of the pace being forced, did his best to be normal and was even guilty, now and again, of considering his profile. His evident embarrassment amused Mrs. Cartmel very much. She found stimulus in emotion and the young man was nice-looking and, at bottom, pleasantly naïf. She took no trouble to look ahead; he was an amusing companion and his blended nervousness and delight in her society gave her a gratifying sense of power. She was wise enough to ascribe part of her evident influence to maturity of mind, and was, therefore, careful to avoid any affectation of excessive youth.

At the same time she failed to allow for any possible idealism in the young man she thought to use as an amusement. Her life had made her rather cynical and she regarded men, in matters sexual, as ready to enjoy what fortune brought to them. The future stages of her affair with Laddie lay, she considered, in her hands and in hers alone. Inexperienced in love, he would not dare to take more than was offered; being male, he would greedily and obediently accept whatever she chose to give.

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One evening they met at a studio-performance in Chelsea. It was a fine October night with a full moon and, the theatricals over, they turned together into Cheyne Walk. A light mist lay on the river, the bridge rising from its silver mesh into the cold hardness of the upper air.

"Come in and have a drink?"

They were standing on her doorstep.

"Thank you. I should love to."

Her sitting-room faced the Thames, a low room with three windows.

He stood and watched the sleeping river under its blanket of autumnal mist, while she found glasses, a siphon, cigarettes.

"What a jolly room! Have you more than one floor?"

"No—only this one. My bedroom is in there; beyond—bathroom and kitchen and a tiny room I use to eat in."

On the walls were etchings and drawings by young France of a decade earlier. Laddie examined them carefully.

"I know this chap," he said, taking down a watercolour of the mining country near the Belgian frontier. "He's gone off badly since he did this. When I was over there last he was doing dismal stuff—all ruled with squares. Got the geometric fever."

"Tell me," she said, "do you know Dacre? He was a pupil of my husband's one autumn in the Midi and I hear he has 'made fury' among the Independants by some freak technique or other.

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I have been meaning to ask you, as I daresay you may have met him."

"I know him, certainly. Saw him in town some months ago. The 'stunt' is painting with the eyes shut. I shouldn't care to rely on that for a living myself for fear the audience might eventually judge with the eyes open, but certainly it seemed to be doing well when I was privileged to behold the prophet."

"Why don't you like him?"

He smiled at her, appreciating her quickness.

"We had a row."

"What about?"

"He insulted a girl."

"Your girl?"

For a moment he hesitated. The pose of rake demanded one reply. Truth suggested another. His choice of the latter applied the spark to Pamela's desire.

"I hadn't one," he said simply.

Possibly she imagined the tone more lonely and pathetic than it really was. The boy was an angel. Her ready mind devised a skilful test. And at the same time such fear of failure as possessed her (and it was only slight) took comfort in the common acquaintanceship of Dacre. To have as friend the enemy of another friend is often useful.

"There are some things in here," she said, carrying a large portfolio to the sofa and opening it on her knee. "You would perhaps be interested in one or two."

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He came behind and, leaning on the sofa back, looked over her shoulder. The portfolio contained sketches, lithographs, pastels, every variety of study and unfinished fragment.

"That's a Renoir," he said suddenly, as she turned to the top a grey drawing of a naked girl. "Very good one too. May I take it to the light?"

By the lamp he examined the drawing closely. The figure sat with arms raised behind the head; the body glimmered indefinitely with sunlight. What a mastery the man had! He could suggest flesh-tones even in monochrome. Laddie returned to the sofa and replaced the drawing.

"Funny thing," he said thoughtfully, "there's more expression in the face than in most of Renoir's nudes. It's familiar to me too. . . . Almost as though the thing were a portrait. . . ."

She threw back her head till it rested on the sofa behind her:

"Perhaps it is," she answered softly.

Her eyes rested on his, as he bent forward immediately above her. He glanced quickly at the drawing once more and flushed. Then stooped suddenly and kissed her on the mouth. In an instant her arms were about his neck and she seemed to hold him with her lips. He opened his eyes to see her white breast, vivid against the low-cut blackness of her satin gown. He felt strangely dizzy. The sensation was so unusual that his brain caught the very word. *Dizziness—vertige*. And with that involuntary flash of

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translation, his sense of the ridiculous returned. He stood up and laughed.

"I've suddenly thought of that beastly picture that used to be in all the shop windows—a woman on a sofa, a man leaning over the back; "Vertige"—it was called. I apologize for involving you in a popular tableau. . . ."

She stared at him, puzzled. That was not a kiss at which one laughed. He had got free from her somehow. She rose and came towards him, her eyes were very bright.

"Love me," she murmured, putting her hands on his shoulders. "Love me. Kiss me again."

He battled with himself. He felt absurd and anxious to be gone.

"Pamela," he said gently, "I'm sorry—but I don't think I can. At least I mean—I suppose I want to kiss you frightfully and yet I don't want to. Not after thinking of that picture."

He tried to move away, but she clung to him, kissing his chin and neck.

"Don't go—stay with me. I love you. Stay with me just to-night."

Involuntarily he thought of Janet and for a moment the woman before him seemed to retreat, to grow small and unmeaning, a speck on a strange horizon. Janet—with her virginal brow, her clean, young arms. But his mind jerked onward. Janet had spurned him. His blood-fever brought back again resentment. If she could please herself, so would he also. And Pamela loomed once more into passionate reality. Instinctively respectful of

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his tortured silence, she had drooped against his coat. He bent to her rich, dark hair and, taking her head between his hands, raised her face to his.

"I was a fool," he muttered, "for you are a lovely thing. . . ."

Her mind sang with triumph. The game was won.

"Ian," she whispered, "just you and I and the night. . . ."

The blunder was none the less fatal for being wholly innocent. For a moment he thought she was speaking to someone else. Then he remembered that his name was Ian. He signed himself Ian. It was the only name she knew, this name by which no intimate had ever called him. The spell snapped. Ridicule, with its keen, relentless violence, set his senses smarting. How utterly strange she was. He did not know her at all. It was ludicrous, ludicrous and pitiful. A woman, who did not even know to call him Laddie, prattled of love. All his background sprang to mocking life. Coldly he loosed her hands from their grip on his coat.

"Good night," he said cruelly. "I have changed my mind."

Without a word she watched him go. She was utterly bewildered. What could have produced this almost inhuman change?

With daylight the problem was unsolved, but bewilderment had given way to anger. As she re-entered her sitting-room for breakfast, the maid came forward with something in her hand.

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"I found this on the floor, 'm."

It was a gold safety-pin.

"Thank you, Mary, I must have dropped it yesterday."

And Pamela felt her appetite return. Dacre and an incriminating pin. There were trumps in her hand, after all.

IV

The frigid aloofness of his mood lasted till Laddie was back at Magdala Houses. He felt self-satisfied, almost a St. Anthony. Sleep came quickly and, while Pamela in Chelsea was tossing from side to side, he lay, dreamless and unmoving, strong in the conceit of a continence that was not his.

The missing safety-pin was the first reminder that the preceding evening had not been altogether that of a Galahad. It was a flat-shaped pin, given him by Christine on his twenty-first birthday and bore the inscription: "Laddie from Christine" and the date. He used it to pin down the ends of his soft collars, under the tie-knot. He did not at first connect its disappearance with the visit to Pamela's flat, until he suddenly remembered there had been wind when he left Bayswater for Chelsea and he had pinned down his evening scarf. He searched his dress-clothes, which were not strewn about the floor but folded, with a bitter precision, on the chest of drawers. With the realization that the pin must have been left at Pamela's, alluring

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memories of his visit crowded back. His scornful rectitude took on an appearance of priggishness. What had seemed a miracle of moral self-control became offensive rudeness. He shrank from meeting Pamela again. How would she tolerate his impertinence? But his real regrets and tremors were for himself. What he had so much dreaded had occurred. His half-baked inexperience had made a coward of him. At the first test, his manhood had turned tail and fled. Last night's impulse to depart was now unintelligible. Blaming his failure in the face of life and apprehensive of the immediate future, he went unhappily to Golden Square.

It was about three o'clock that afternoon that the fingers trilled their query on his office door. He had a moment of panic. How would she treat him? But Pamela seemed normal and unruffled. She made no reference to what had passed, merely examining the latest arrivals for reviewing and talking ordinary, business talk. He felt his case of mind returning and his regrets for the opportunity so madly thrown away became keener and more urgent. Perhaps there was still hope? Perhaps he had not been so very rude . . . ?

"Such an odd thing," she said suddenly. "You remember my asking you about John Dacre? Here I get a letter this morning from Conrobert saying they have taken him on as designer."

"Oh—Massenet, Conrobert? Why?"

"They are starting a new colour printing and lithographic branch and I suppose Mr. Dacre has a name for posters or something of the kind. Let

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us hope they will manage to keep his eyes from closing."

Both laughed. Laddie, as Pamela had intended, was still further reassured by her mockery of Dacre, with its implied sympathy for his own dislike.

When she had gone, he remembered that neither had made mention of the pin. He was incapable himself of introducing the subject, and had vaguely hoped she might have found it and brought it with her. As she had not done so and appeared in everything so friendly and so usual, he wondered whether perhaps it had not dropped in her sitting-room at all. He would enquire at the studio. Or maybe it was in the street somewhere. Hopeless, in that case. A pity—because it was a nice pin and useful.

He was about to start home for dinner when a note was brought to him. The writing was unfamiliar.

"DEAR MR. MACALLISTER,—I should be so pleased if you would dine here next Tuesday at 8 o'clock. My niece, Janet Tring, is staying with me and I believe you met in Yorkshire. Sincerely yours, ISABEL FINEDON."

The surprise was genuine. Why in the world should Lady Finedon ask him to dinner? It must be Janet's doing. But why? By the time he reached Magdala Houses, although still unable to explain the invitation, he was fully and painfully

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aware of several other and unpleasant facts. The first of these was that he had not escaped from Mrs. Cartmel's room the night before on any creditable impulse; he had, so to speak, fluked into freedom thanks to his innate orderliness of mind and to the crochets of his sense of humour. Morally he had yielded, and he felt soiled by his surrender. He further realized that his nervousness before and his confidence during and after Pamela's visit to the office on that very afternoon had been for himself alone. He had feared ridicule or anger or exposure; as these were spared him he had begun to hope for a chance to gratify his own sensual desires. Finally he now saw in their right perspective his feelings towards Pamela. They had never been anything but selfish. What he thought was admiration was only flattered self-conceit; what he nearly took for love was not even respect.

Growing self-disgust rejoiced that, Dermot being out of town, dinner could be eaten in solitude. Before the fire with a pipe Laddie lay in a deep chair and faced his own degeneracy. Power to diagnose it as such gave hope of recovery and his practical sense and hatred of the sentimental were welcome reinforcement. It was obvious that Lady Finedon's invitation was virtually Janet's invitation. Therefore Janet wanted to see him again. How desperately he wanted to see her again, he made no attempt either to conceal or minimize. He took out her photograph. She looked so dependable, so straight. The moorland air, the sane outline of the fells, the rippling ribbon of the walls

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—she was the spirit of them all. Clear cold that warmed. And Pamela? And he himself? Playthings of a great city, two of a million wantons, chilled by the uneasy heat of room after scented room. Janet could save him if she would. He scribbled a brief acceptance for Tuesday's dinner, feeling that a link between them had been forged. He was swinging over towards Janet once again. Already he was indifferent to Pamela. As always, he despised himself. On his knees he prayed that Janet might have mercy.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

I

JANET, for all her level-headedness, was not wholly proof against the lighter failings of young womanhood. That Laddie should have abstracted and retained a snapshot of herself gratified her. Flattery had hitherto struck her as boring and silly. Cheerfully she admitted herself nice-looking, but her standard was one of health and freshness only. Her appearance concerned herself. But now a young man considered it concerned him also—sufficiently at least to want a presentation of it for his own. Inexplicably it was rather nice of him. So direct and unselfconscious was she, that it did not occur to her to ask why the want, coming from one young man, was rather nice, while, from another, it would have been impertinence. So logical, however, and so honest was she, that this far-distance avowal of partiality for herself imparted warmth and colour to the ideal but unincarnate Laddie, that had begun slowly to emerge from the conflict between her aspirations and the principles of her parents. Indeed the elements of intimacy were born. He stood in her mind for fine ideas ; she stood in his

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—for what? That, in her unembarrassed way, she left unprobed. Something at any rate. And she wrote to Lady Finedon fixing an October visit.

The Sunday after her arrival at the Dark Tower, Barbara Carnforth came to tea. Lady Finedon was dining out and the tea-time visit was prolonged to include supper and the evening.

“You children can entertain each other, but don’t stay talking too late. I may not be in till after twelve—the Prendergasts are such interesting people, and I believe Sir Horace has a Voodoo priest staying there. So grisly. I shall stop my ears when he comes to details.”

The cousins were on excellent terms. Hitherto Miss Carnforth’s volcanic feminism had found in Janet a soothing but intelligent listener. To-night, however, the all-absorbing subject met with listlessness, almost disrespect.

“You are very stupid to-night,” said Barbara in disgust, after three attempts to interest her cousin in the heroism of the latest and most tragic hunger-striker. “I do hope to goodness you are not going to turn sentimental or any of that rubbish. What’s the matter?”

“I was thinking,” answered Janet placidly, “thinking about men and women and dogs. One sees so many.”

Barbara, who had no eye either for men or dogs, condemned the remark as futile.

“There has been more than enough thinking and far more than enough talking. It is time now to act. The Conciliation Bill . . .”

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"Barbara ! For heaven's sake give that wretched subject a little peace ! We had quite a gay summer in Scarthdale. The new vicar is a dear and so are his daughter and his sons."

"Kids ?"

"Oh, no—all grown up. One is a soldier and the other writes or does something. By the way you met him—here—this summer, when there was a thunderstorm——"

"Janet, you are drivelling ! The vicar has a daughter and two sons ; one is a soldier. Is that the daughter ?"

"I'm so sorry, Barbara ; I quite forgot poor Christine. No, she gardens and housekeeps and does all the slavish, old-fashioned things that you and I have rightly left behind."

Miss Carnforth did not like being laughed at, especially by unexpected cousins. She refused to be side-tracked by Christine and pursued her accurate and unrelenting way.

"You then ask me whether I remember meeting some wholly unspecified young man in a thunderstorm. I never notice young men and hardly ever thunderstorms."

"The name is Macallister." Janet was maddeningly calm. "We were talking and you interrupted."

"I do happen to recall, now that you are more explicit, that you did talk to a Mr. Macallister here one night when Aunt Isabel had a party. The reason is doubtless that I saw him again, not very long ago, here in London."

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If Barbara expected her cousin to betray any symptoms of unusual attention, she was disappointed. Janet was interested, unaffectedly so, but her voice was level and her eyes were mild.

"Where was that?"

"Lunching with a woman I know." Barbara's mouth closed with a more than usually emphatic snap.

"What kind of woman?" asked Janet indifferently.

"A rotten kind. If there's one thing worse than a man, it's a woman who runs after men."

"It does sound tiring," commented Janet easily; and the subject dropped.

A few days later Lady Finedon invited Laddie to dinner. Janet's share in the event was singularly unashamed.

"I wish you would ask Mr. Macallister to dinner, Aunt Isabel."

"Certainly, dear, who is he?"

"The son of our new vicar at Stonecliffe. I saw him several times in August and liked him. You have had him before, because I first saw him here at one of your parties."

Lady Finedon prided herself on knowing every visitor to the Dark Tower. She hastened to repair her error. Her secretary would know the address.

"Of course; I remember him quite well. Such a clever young man. I'll write at once. Shall we say Tuesday?"

It occurred to her, even in her momentary agita-

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tion, to wonder at her niece's request. But the girl's manner was entirely normal and an important feature of Lady Finedon's modernity was the encouragement of frank relations between the sexes. So, between the self-possession of the niece and the suppression by the aunt of an aunt's natural curiosity, the incident passed without remark.

II

The company at dinner, granted Lady Finedon, were rather inevitable. Bertram Tawton, who was accompanied by his wife, was a Treasury official of paralysing cynicism. His lean, dark-shaven face, his scraggy neck rising disillusioned from a Winston collar, his finely cared-for, tapering hands seemed to combine in one relentless sneer against his world, his friends, even himself. Mrs. Tawton was sugary and overdressed. She wore an immense tortoise-shell comb, projecting like the raised lid of a tankard over the vacancy of her handsome head. Her neighbour at table was a portly gentleman with what is called a military moustache. He was a childhood's friend of Lady Finedon and liked to describe her as his "old flame," a habit which led to much heavy playfulness and many references to the unmerited good fortune of the late Sir Valentine. Before the soup was finished, Laddie had bet himself five shillings that Mr. Pridgett would, when the ladies had

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withdrawn, humorously assume the place of host, pressing cigars and port on the other guests with genial explanation of how almost quite they were his own to offer. There remained, beside Janet and Laddie, a severe but otherwise nondescript female, called "Adelaide" by Lady Finedon and "Pudge" by Janet; and one of those plump, dapper, little Jews, with pale brown moustaches and pleated shirts, who never fail to appear at any dinner-party west of the Albert Hall and are even to be found in Berkeley Square. Lady Finedon's specimen was perfect in every detail. He had a nervous titter, jewelled waistcoat buttons and an evident love of beautiful things.

Laddie was glad the guests were talkative. His nervous forebodings of the evening, the thrill of seeing Janet again and now, at table, her presence next him, had suspended temporarily the normal working of his brain. He emitted an occasional commonplace and watched her blessed fingers crumbling her unresponsive bread. Mostly the two were silent, Janet, as always, happy to be quiet, Laddie listening abstractedly to the discord of the chattering table. The prevalent topic was, for the moment, interior decoration.

"... simply must do something. The walls are too filthy and I'm tired of blue."

The waterfall of Lady Finedon's exuberance swirled in eddies down the gleaming mahogany of the unclothed table.

"Old age coming on, Isabel," chuckled the portly gentleman. "I remember the time when

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blue was the colour for breaking hearts. You wore a blue dress at the Assembly Ball at——”

Bertram Tawton's incisive drawl sliced this pulpy reminiscence as a razor slices cheese.

“You can't do better than employ young Bohemia. Pansy has had her drawing-room done and all the beauties of Surbiton are ours. She will describe it to you better than I. Tell Lady Finedon about the mantelpiece, Pansy. And the last state of my walnut Tallboy. Seven other spirits more wicked than himself. Yellow spots—and pink—and grey. . . .”

He pursed his lips and drank some claret. His wife smiled her sweetest smile.

“Isn't he dreadful? And he likes it so much really. Too original! You see we have always wasted time recreating the antique. So why the antique? That is the question these people ask. Why not the penultimate? Isn't it sweetly young? So hard! so new! I can assure you the result is immensely fresh.”

“What about the mantelpiece, Mrs. Tawton?” It was the little Jew, and his sensitive forehead seemed to wilt in advance from the coming revelation.

“Simply a copy of one of those charming, curly, marble ones in lodging-houses. You know—with speckles and what do you call them?—flutes (isn't it flutes, Bertram darling? I can't remember technicalities) and delicious round, black knobs. And the walls all marbled—yellow and grey—like the wall-paper in passages that

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the long barometers hang in and won't work. And——”

“And ornamented finger-plates painted on the doors,” snarled her husband. “Painted! that's good. Saves buying any, you see. No cleaning required.”

“And the Tallboy, Mrs. Tawton?” persisted the little Jew with faint disgust. “Is it an old one?”

“Oh dear, yes—Queen Anne. Why, Bertie's father had it fifty years I should think! They painted it grey with——”

The little Jew groaned audibly.

“Who are these people?” he asked.

“The ‘Ateliers Albert’ in Stoke Newington. Called after Prince Albert. So nice he should be coming in again after these years of anti-Victorianism. And Stoke Newington! One goes in a white bus. They have show-rooms in Bloomsbury, but I go out to the workshops always. I love seeing the stark, young things at work!”

Lady Finedon, rapid as ever, captured the conversation: “They won't do for me, I fear. This house is exactly the date of the things they reproduce. It looks like the scenery of a touring musical-comedy already. They wouldn't touch it for fear of desecration.”

“Nothing to spoil!” laughed the stout gentleman.

The little Jew saw an opening for pliant amiability. “You have conquered it so well, Lady Finedon. These curtains are truly Craig. Is not your Conder new, over by the sideboard?”

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"I bought it at Christie's a week ago. How quick you are, Mr. Lyon! Nothing escapes you."

The bashful Hebrew seemed to shudder deprecation.

"I read a most interesting article on Conder," he said silkily, "in the *Vanguard*, a few weeks ago. I wanted very much to know who wrote it."

"Mr. Macallister will tell you," said Janet suddenly. "Perhaps he wrote it himself."

"Oh no, I didn't," said Laddie hastily. He stopped rather short. Janet wondered if he did not want to say the writer's name.

Mr. Lyon, racially irrepressible, smiled his too intelligent smile.

"Perhaps the anonymity of journalism is sacred?"

Bertram Tawton provided the interruption Laddie longed for, but hardly in an ideal form.

"I suppose Pamela Cartmel wrote it. She is art critic for the *Vanguard*. Pity all journalists aren't women and all women art-critics. Then there would be no newspapers and not much marriage."

Mrs. Tawton sighed affectedly.

"Cruel creature!" she whimpered.

Laddie had now recovered.

"Yes, Mrs. Cartmel wrote it. I'm glad you thought it good, Mr. Lyon. She'll be interested."

"Very perceptive, full of sympathy. She might have known him well."

"I believe she did," replied Laddie.

His naïveté now led him to what he would, in a calmer moment, have recognized for folly. He

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turned to Janet, delighted to have found a moment's common interest. All the evening he had racked his brain for something personal to say. Scarthdale had long ago been exhausted, for Janet made no effort to extend the life of moribund exchange of talk. The mention of Pamela instantly suggested another opportunity.

"By the way, I met your cousin, Miss Carnforth."

Janet nodded pleasantly.

"Where?"

"In a restaurant. I was lunching with someone from the office and Miss Carnforth came past our table."

"I believe Barbara mentioned it," said Janet, "but I had forgotten. The goose has been in prison again. She thrives on hardship."

Her voice and glance were gentle and unhurried, but something told Laddie he had been detected in concealment. Her self-possession made her all the more tremendous. He was glad she knew he lunched with Pamela. Even that he should have tried evasion and have failed was not ungratifying. It fitted the conception of himself, which at present he cherished, as the degenerate weakling, strengthened and corrected by the triumphant rectitude of this amazing girl.

At this moment occurred one of those unaccountable and incalculable silences, to which even the most rhetorical of dinner-parties are liable. Mr. Pridgett, of course, pulled out his watch to see if it was twenty past. But more im-

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portant than Pridgett—in fact destined for Laddie to be supremely important—was the isolation and enshrinement, in that sudden courtyard of silence, of the nondescript female's first audible remark. Painfully audible indeed. As the quiet dropped on the table, thrusting back the diners' personalities with its quelling but impalpable force, as Pridgett's gold watch, nestled in his hand, opened its golden lid with a tiny thud, "Adelaide's" head began violently to shake and she said :

"No, Isabel ! *Never* next the skin ! "

Laddie wondered what would happen. The little Jew had already trickled smoothly into a new and efficient exposition. Mrs. Tawton had the pained look of a Pekinese offered dry bread. Her husband smiled sardonically with one half of his mouth and drank claret with the other. Lady Finedon seemed to wish her name wasn't Isabel. Realizing none of these folk would give the required cue, Laddie glanced at Janet. Heaven be praised, she was giggling ! Actually ! Janet giggling ! He had barely grasped this stupendous fact, when something even more immense occurred. She leant towards him, her strong, white nose wrinkled with the effort of outward solemnity.

"Isn't Pudge sweet ? " she whispered. " Underclothes are her subject. You get her on to silk-and-wool."

And she held her handkerchief over her mouth, choking down the unseemly but rising mirth.

The thought of getting Pudge on to silk-and-wool appealed to Laddie so much that he caught

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his neighbour's giggles. He was a gentlemanly giggler and didn't creak suddenly on the in-breaths. Janet saw his affliction and admired his competence. She also, for the first time, found him nice-looking. His hair drooped at one corner into a funny lump—not exactly a curl but nice and friendly. The narrow, sarcastic mouth—perhaps from its very contrast to her own—pleased her with its promise of rapid irony. . . .

Lady Finedon swayed to her feet, smiling skilfully at the other ladies. All left the room—Janet last. As she passed to the door, she glanced at Laddie across the table. He stood, one hand still on her chair back, the other crumpling his napkin ; his eyes were fixed on her face. She shivered a little and wondered why she smiled. Everything was rather exciting somehow. . . .

As the door closed, Laddie won his five shillings. The first force of Pridgett's hospitality spent, Tawton brought his wineglass round to the place where Janet had been sitting.

"So you're on the *Vanguard*?" he said. "How do you like Postlethwaite?"

"I think he's a great man," replied Laddie, "but I don't know that I *like* him, exactly."

"I understand he claims to be incorruptible. As if any journalist was incorruptible! Are you all like that on the *Vanguard*?"

"Good heavens, no!" said Laddie cheerfully. "We all have our price. Graded—according to seniority. But the most expensive of us is so ludicrously dear that for Postlethwaite to go one

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better wouldn't be business. So he is incorruptible. You see how it works? Knocks Marconi silly."

The first part of this remark was too like the sort of thing that Tawton himself enjoyed saying to be altogether pleasing. Marconi, however, gave a congenial outlet. He moved from journalists to politicians and so to the sale of honours. An involved argument, designed to show why it was dishonest of Gladstone to have refused a peerage and scandalous of Disraeli to have accepted one, was interrupted by the move upstairs.

"Miss Tring will be wondering what has become of her partner," said Mr. Pridgett playfully, and though Laddie knew the remark for the spongy kindness it was and was grateful for the move, he would gladly have kicked the speaker.

On the way upstairs he felt suddenly brave. He went straight over to where Janet bent her broad, white forehead over patience cards. "How like her," he thought, "to play patience in a corner!"

"I want to go on the roof," he said. "It's cold but fine. Please get a shawl or something and show me the way."

She looked at him a moment. Her forehead seemed to cleave the wave of golden hair with an angle of brilliant white. She was very feminine, with her great, soft eyes and the calm wisdom of her chin. Perhaps the mouth was a trifle full. . . . Her femininity increased his feeling of domination. He stood gravely silent, awaiting her reply.

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It was physical—not verbal. She rose and crossed with him to the door.

“Mr. Macallister wants to see the view, Aunt Isabel. Yes—Pudge—I’ll put on two shawls and a Jaeger dressing-gown.”

They were alone on the landing.

As they climbed upwards and as he waited for her shawling, he wondered idly what he was going to say. Propose to her, of course. The coincidence of place was too striking to ignore. Also she was absolutely the being he had dreamt of. But how must it be done? Leave it to chance.

It was certainly cold. Almost a touch of frost. They stood just outside the door of the spiral staircase. Laddie watched the traffic in Holland Park Avenue far below—the dazzling headlights of a private car stroking the roadway into swiftly moving snow; the homely dimness of a motor-bus, yellow beside the acetylene brilliance of the limousine, a lumbering box of unambitious joys, weariness, despair; a bicycle, flitting silently down the hill, its darting movements picked out in colour-sound by the sharp chirrup of its bell; a heavy dray; a taxicab or two.

“May I smoke?” he asked.

She nodded.

“Give me one, too, please.”

“I didn’t know you smoked.”

“I don’t—not like that. But I want to now.”

He held the match for her and thanked Heaven again—this time for the gift of sudden flame in

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darkness. The hard light seemed to emphasize the essential character of her face—a strong but very youthful face, wistful and yet maternal. As the match went out and left the darkness for the moment more intense, he began talking rather quickly, at first nervously, then with perfect self-possession.

“Janet—I fell in love with you here—the first time I ever saw you in the flesh. I am now going to ask you to consider marrying me. The prospect is unattractive; even more unattractive than it looks. I will at present spare you a description of the advantages from my point of view and concentrate on the disadvantages from yours——”

She made an uneasy movement, as though about to speak. He laid a hand gently on her arm.

“Not for a minute—I’m not being flippant really—it’s only my cursed self-conceit. This is quite serious. I am not a waster. That is to say I work hard and am intelligent and sane. Such vices as I have are negative. But I am an uncreative artist, if you will allow so priggish an expression. I mean I love beauty but cannot work off that love in the creation of other beauty. Consequently I am, in certain things, rather unstable. If you will take me on—and I need you, Janet, absolutely, pitifully almost—take me on and stand by me, I shall learn to stand by you. You are so strong, so—oh, my dear, there are no words!—but you are safe-harbour, anchorage, something firm to cling to, and—I think that’s all.”

To his surprise he found she held him by the

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hand ; her grip tightened. She answered almost without a pause.

" You exaggerate—endless things frighten me. I am only a country person and your great town frightens me—all these clever people. . . . But I believe I understand. Anything I can give is gladly given—to you, or—no, not to anyone, but—I mean, I haven't considered marriage yet. It's so large, so everywhere. Leave me a little longer. It has been so short a time. If I can I will—indeed I will. . . ."

The appeal in her voice was almost anguish. Deeply moved, he stooped and kissed her hand.

" When you are ready you will tell me. Till then—I will try and hold on."

" Yes—hold on," she murmured, ". . . for my sake. . . ." And was gone.

.

Two days later he received a little note :

" I am going home to think everything over. Be merciful and give me time. I am rather alone. Please do not write at present. JANET."

The pathos raised a lump in his throat. She became of a sudden infinitely pitiful, solitary. Incoherently he prayed for constancy. His pen sketched tiny pictures on the blotting-pad.

CHAPTER TWELVE

I

AND yet it was, strangely enough, at this eleventh hour that there occurred the episode of Charlotte Drake. All these months she had been about Vanguard House, visible, accessible. But he had realized nothing beyond her efficiency. It was one afternoon, not a week after the receipt of Janet's note, that he first noticed she was beautiful. An elusive, rather sullen beauty, which, like friendship, gained force by its greater duration. As the weeks went by, her personality grew in fascination. She was so aloof, so full of possibility. It was not the aloofness of Janet, whose crystal isolation had the unconsciousness of some great peak of snow ; Miss Drake was wise with the wisdom of the London girl, silent almost in self-defence, embattled against a ruthless world. And yet the temperament flamed in her eyes under their lowering brows. At times a wild desire would seize him to strip the girl of her armour of competence and self-reliance, only to die away in scorn at his own presumption or in shame at the treason to the other girl he loved.

In explanation rather than in extenuation of the

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emergence, at this moment, of Miss Drake as feminine and therefore alluring, it may be urged that the impulse was at bottom the same as that which had driven Laddie to intimacy with Pamela Cartmel—namely, love of Janet. Relations with Pamela were now of an outward smoothness that betokened a lack of inward cordiality. He was deprived of the sex-echo that his genuine love-longing cried for. Just as Pamela had been substitute for Janet, so Charlotte Drake became substitute for Pamela, and so, at second remove, for Janet also. There was this difference; that while he had, latterly at any rate, been conscious of his drift from Pamela, he so little realized the current that was carrying him towards Charlotte, that he was unaware, in his dealings with her, of any element other than the cheerfully familiar.

Two events prepared the way for what was to occur. In the first place, Dermot went to America. This happened at the end of November and Laddie was left alone at Magdala Houses. His solitude was deepened by Janet's silence. He could not write to her. She would not write to him. His devotion, intensified by separation and by the appealing brevity of her parting note, was left, so to speak, in mid-air. He was in love—but with a void.

The second pregnant happening was the breakdown and departure for six months' rest of Audley Garratt. Postlethwaite sent for Laddie, commented gruffly on those qualities of quickness and common sense which his work had shown and in-

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structed him to carry on in Garratt's absence. The new work, entirely commercial, was not wholly strange ; but its intricacies needed understanding and Laddie found himself compelled to rely to a large extent on Garratt's secretary, Charlotte Drake.

They now worked in close and constant intimacy. She would talk from time to time with a husky brevity that charmed and tantalized. Her humour would leap like a tongue of flame from the smouldering gloom of her reserve. And the months slipped away.

One evening at the end of March they stayed late to finish some important figures. She had left the room to get ready to go home and Laddie stood at the window gazing into Golden Square. It was a night of mist and rain, of all London weather the most magical. Far below, the street lamps, each with its halo of mist, strewed petals of reflected light on the gleaming pavements. The dark mass of the trees in the central garden was suggested rather than seen, and against the blackness one could imagine the grey tears of the rain, streaking the background of the night.

" Nothing more to-night, Mr. Macallister ? "

He turned sharply, took in as though by divination her mysterious and forceful beauty and replied, almost automatically :

" Only dinner. You are dining with me."

She frowned slightly, but he thought her eyes gleamed. She played with the button of her glove.

" I must go home," she said ; and a stranger would have thought her angry.

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“Why?”

Her brooding glance enveloped him. As on a previous occasion, the hinted submission of the woman made him masterful. He picked up his coat and slipped it on.

“Come along,” he said, and took her arm.

She came obediently and they walked in silence through the whispering rain. The little restaurant was emptying fast. Laddie, his elbows on the table, watched his companion choosing the hors d'œuvres. At last she raised her eyes and met his steady gaze. She coloured suddenly.

“I shouldn't be here,” she said quickly. “You shouldn't have made me come.”

He noticed that the hand which held her fork was trembling. A sudden wonder flickered across his mind. With it came, vivid as a cinematograph, a scene on the moorland walk with his father when they were looking for a house. The two had lunched in a hollow of the fells and lay, with pipes alight, against the slope of the hillside, while the gentle wind silvered the tussocky grass and around and above them slanted the stark dignity of the sincerest country in the world.

“There's one thing I want to say to you, old chap,” the Canon had remarked abruptly. “Not a moral exhortation—we know each other too well for that—but a word of advice based on what experience has taught me. I have spent many years trying to know myself and you are my son and—after all, there is nothing humiliating in hearing what our elders have gone through. Just this.

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You are one of the people that women will like. More than you will realize, I dare say ; I hope so, at any rate. For it is the most tempting power on earth, that of winning women—the most tempting and the most impossible to wield without brutality. But if you can remember one thing (trite enough, but not always kept in mind), I think you will be happier and I am sure you will spare others misery. Never make love to a woman without thinking what will happen if she returns it."

And Laddie had answered, after a moment's thought : " All right, reverend. I'll try and remember."

Now, as he watched the girl sitting a foot or two away, this incident recurred with electrifying clarity. He saw the smallest details of that lonely spot—the clear, brown spring ; the basins of spongy moss, white, pink and green ; the red leaves of the sun-dew, quaintly gluttonous ; the grass of Parnassus, pure and carelessly erect. Above all he heard his father's kindly diffidence : " Without thinking what will happen if she returns it."

He now saw how little impression the advice had really made.

When it was given he was in full rebound from Paris, and love-making stood in his mind for tortuous sentiment or furtive licence. He had listened with the respect due to a father ; technically, doubtless, he had grasped the force of the remark. But an occasion, to which such a precaution would be apt, seemed so utterly unlikely to arise, that he had applied the homily, academic-

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ally, to others rather than to himself. The real shock of the present was the realization that all these months he had, in effect, been making love to Charlotte Drake. And he had thought it normal friendliness! That the folly should have been unconscious humiliated him.

And then another memory; this time of Postlethwaite. He was with Dermot in the editorial room; before them, crouched in his chair, the tiny despot sneered. When at last, in his contemptuous way, he offered Laddie the job which was to link him with the *Vanguard*, the editor had given in a sentence the reason for the vacancy. At the time Laddie had felt a twinge of scornful amusement. And now? He saw himself, in this instant, sordid and pathetic, an insensitive, blundering philanderer. Bitterly he swept contrition from his mind; she would never understand. The thing must stop. Nothing else had, for the moment, significance.

It was not difficult to chatter now. Indeed ceaseless talk lulled his nerves. Not till the pair were once again shrouded behind the curtain of the weeping night did he drop his mask of bantering cynicism.

"Good-night, Charlotte," he said simply. "Thank you for coming."

"I enjoyed it," she replied laughingly, "but I shall have to think what to tell mother."

The hint of intrigue jarred. His earlier vision of himself as an erring idealist, saving from herself a girl that loved him, gave place to a less attractive picture. Perhaps she was not serious. Perhaps

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he was merely a "fellow," presentable and amusing. The conception shrivelled his self-esteem and he spoke almost sharply.

"Tell her the truth. There's nothing to be ashamed of. I am quite respectable."

She was cut to the quick. Acting honestly by the conventions of her upbringing, she had put all the pitiful romance of her own desire into the little joke he had so cruelly distorted. She had invited him to share their joy in secret and he had torn away the treasured secrecy, treating what was to her an altar as merely a milestone by the way. How was she to understand that his reality was frankness, or he that her proffered conspiracy was a sacred ritual? His hyper-consciousness of self, her wish to shut out the world from her happiness, clashed endlessly and always. She began to cry, but her natural self-control forbade more than silent tears.

Utterly bewildered he laid a hand on her shoulder.

"Charlotte—what is the matter?"

She dabbed her eyes and moved abruptly.

"Good-night," she said bravely. "Thank you for dinner."

Next morning she was, as usual, pale and collected. They worked mechanically, morbidly conscious of one another, the girl dully miserable, the man shy and anxious. The part parallel, part contrast to the affair of Mrs. Cartmel haunted his embarrassment. There would soon not be a

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woman in the office he could meet without awkward memories.

"It's awful," he thought. "I must be about the limit."

And he decided to go and see his father.

Next moment the desk-telephone rang. A personal summons from the chief. Laddie went downstairs incuriously. He was too much occupied with his emotional shortcomings to speculate on the meaning of this unusual occurrence. Postlethwaite kept a tight hand on every department of Vanguard House, but his orders came either by telephone or through a secretary. He was almost genial as Laddie entered the room.

"Sit down, Macallister. I want you to go to Germany for us. We intend a new venture—(this is private, I needn't say. I only tell you because otherwise you could not understand)—an illustrated weekly, good pictures, good letterpress. You are doubtless aware that there is to be a great exhibition at Leipzig this summer—printing, book-making and allied trades. The Germans lead in printing machinery and you know the language well. Hence this journey. You will receive detailed instructions later. I want you to start in about six weeks. The exhibition is due to open in May. Go straight there and see how matters stand. Then I shall want you to travel round and judge how best we can be served. Some time in July you will return to Leipzig and, with your previously gained perspective, you can advise us what to buy. I also want you to familiarize your-

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self with the working of whatever we select. First and last the job will take four months or so, as there are other small commissions you can carry out while you are over there."

Postlethwaite stopped and Laddie rose.

"Very well, sir. Thank you for sending me. Can I have a few days off to see my people and get things ready?"

"Let me see—Garratt expects to be back in ten days. You can go then—for a week or so. I want you here again a little while before you leave. There will be a lot to explain. That's all at present."

"Ten days more of these cursed cross-purposes with Charlotte," Laddie thought, as he returned to his room. "Oh well, I suppose we shall get over that." The prospect of a summer abroad was grateful. "Seems I slip out of France into England and again out of England into Germany when things get really tied-up. Wonder how I shall get out of Leipzig and why I shall want to. Something will turn up probably."

Characteristically, he worried so much over the Charlotte incident that, in an attempt to better matters, he dragged the unlucky subject once more into publicity. Characteristically also, he sought to hide his own embarrassment under that very nonchalance which underlined the difference between himself and the girl he wished to soothe. Accustomed to men who, though inarticulate, always showed clearly the mood which ruled them, even Charlotte Drake had in the past shrunk from

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the flippancy of Laddie's conversation. She wondered if it meant insincerity and, realizing that it cloaked something other than itself, she suspected that something to be mockery.

"Good news for you," he remarked. "Mr. Garratt will be back in a few days now."

She bit her lip.

"Is it good news?"

If only he had been frank, if only he had even kept a clumsy silence, the danger might have been averted. But his dread of sentiment, intensified by the thrill her words had caused, choked back the free expression that he ached for and held him miserably to levity.

"Well, at least you get rid of me—more or less—and that is something."

She looked at him and the silence was tremulous with feeling. Suddenly she sobbed, stifling the sound with the terrible strength of stubborn pride. But when she spoke, it was a different person talking, a shrill, common creature with the high-pitched urgency of Cockney repartee.

"Dare say you're right. I should say it was 'something.' Means I keep my job anyway. As you're going, I needn't. You thought you'd beaten me, I suppose, but it takes a bigger thing than you to do that. . . ."

She broke off, breathless; the forced lightness of her first words had kindled involuntarily to anger, anger that was really misery. The sight of Laddie, motionless and with bowed head, sitting absurdly humble at his desk, checked her

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violence and left her dangling over the pit of her now valueless repentance. He neither stirred nor spoke. Turning away, she busied herself with some papers on a table in the corner of the room. The brief respite gave her back control. With her normal husky quietness she crossed the room towards him, her hand full of letters.

"Sorry I was a fool. Will you look at these now? They should be signed, if they are to catch the five o'clock post."

Reason struggled with instinct and the latter won. Logically he told himself matters could not rest there; something more must be said. But obscurely and deep in himself, instinct enjoined silence, urged that the wretched business be abandoned, that further tinkering would only make it worse.

"Thank you," he replied steadily. "I had forgotten them; and they ought to go to-night."

II

The Canon was in residence, and it was, therefore, in the gaunt neo-Gothic study of the Chester house that father and son sat on the first evening of the latter's holiday. No questions had been asked on Laddie's arrival; his father had merely telephoned cancellation of an engagement and the family had talked through their meal with the shorthand brevity of their perfect intimacy,

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remarks spurting from them disjointedly like jets of steam from friendly and adjacent engines.

Now, in the lofty and never very comfortable study, spasmodic talk had given way to silence. From the depths of his chair the Canon spiralled pipe-smoke towards the fire and Laddie watched it float indifferently across the rug, until the suction of the chimney draught made it stagger and pause and finally twitch convulsively out of sight.

"What a beastly mantelpiece this is," he remarked.

"It is," agreed the Canon. "Pugin has a lot to answer for. But you didn't come up from London in order to criticize my mantelpiece."

"No," replied his son, "I didn't."

Again they sat in silence. The clock ticked with that ineffective pomposity common to ecclesiastical clocks in lay surroundings. At last Laddie spoke :

"I want to marry Janet Tring."

"That sounds so probable an aspiration, I find it difficult to believe. You are getting conventional, Laddie."

"Am I? I never thought of it like that. I suppose heaps of people want to?"

"Well, she is very beautiful. But what are her views—or haven't you told her?"

"Lord, yes. I've told her all right. She has been thinking about it for six months. The wonder is she even thought for six minutes."

"Perhaps she doesn't know the worst, old chap. You are really quite bearable externally."

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Laddie smiled.

"I tried to make it clear to her." He leant forward to knock his pipe into the grate. "Do you remember, Reverend, telling me some time ago to count the costs of making love? Well—I seem to be a rotter at mathematics."

The Canon glanced at his son.

"What have you been up to?" he asked quickly.

"Up to? Oh, I haven't done anything scandalous—not as the world would think, that is. But I'm rather fed up with myself, and Janet is the cure. I want something to hold on to, a sort of anchor. . . . I told her so," he added rather abruptly.

The Canon did not smile. He sat without speaking, staring through narrowed lids at the fire.

"Poor child," he said at last, "I don't expect she understood. You will be rather a handful. I was, I know, and you are much the same problem. When do you think she will pronounce?"

"I haven't the faintest notion," admitted Laddie. "I think I shall go over and see her. I'm going to Germany, you know—in a few weeks—for the paper. Machinery buying. . . . Sounds quaint, doesn't it?" (He saw surprised amusement on his father's face.) "You didn't know I was a mechanic, did you?"

"There is now no limit to my credulity. I am glad they are sending you. It will be interesting. You will be away for long?"

"Till September, I expect. Not buying machinery all the time. Running round and looking up

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Social Democrats and tying inter-journalistic knots. All kinds of things."

"I see. Yes; on the strength of so long an absence I think you would be justified in going to Scarthdale. You'll stay at home, of course? Better wire Mrs. Bottomley to prepare for you."

Two days later Laddie was at Greywethers. Mrs. Bottomley had scooped a semi-habitable clearing among the dust-sheets and bales of curtains, and in this uneasy isolation a much reprobated Mr. Ian found himself marooned.

Beyond feeling sure that he could not go to Scarthdale and demand Janet, he was without definite plans. Indeed they would have been unnecessary, for normally, in a place so small as Stonecliffe, everyone met everyone at least twice every day. The weather, however, was far from normal. The tireless moorland rain beat the garden and the stony roads; low on the patient hills hung wet, relentless clouds. Thoroughly dejected, Laddie trailed about the village. A whole day passed and there was no sign of Janet. His resolution began to falter. He wondered whether she would resent his coming, whether this importunity might not wreck all the good work his months of obedient silence had achieved. A second day proved equally unfruitful. The rain still blotted out the upper basin of the dale. Sick to death of his Burberry, his boots, his half-upholstered life in this carpetless, unwelcoming house, he wrote her a note, gave it to a small boy and

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promised that the sixpence on account should become two shillings if the messenger brought back an answer.

"I will be at the old horse-trough by the road to High Moss at eleven to-morrow morning."

"Cheap at two bob," thought Laddie.

The next day was at least fair. The obstinate clouds still swathed the valley walls, but the sky was a shade less densely grey and there was a promise of wind. At the horse-trough he found her, a small oilskin hat crowning her golden hair. They shook hands gravely.

"Is this playing fair?" she asked at once.

"Janet, you know I shouldn't have come without a reason. I have come because I am going to Germany, probably until September. And I wanted to know whether . . . whether you had anything to tell me, anything I could take away. . . ."

She looked past him to the sodden hills. Her colour was high, but between her eyes a tiny frown told that her trouble was perplexity and not rapturous shyness.

"I am so sorry—so dreadfully sorry——" (His heart dropped like a dead thing, but he made no movement.) "——I have thought and wondered and tried—but still I am not sure. . . ."

The recovery was intoxication. The greatest art could not better have broken the news. He was more than happy, even at this moderate consolation.

"Then there is a chance yet?" he interrupted.

She was a little startled at his vehemence,

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having expected disappointment and possibly reproach.

"Oh, yes, of course, why not?"

He laughed excitedly.

"Why not indeed? But I thought you were going to say something else. Do you—forgive me, if this is not the game—do you know how much longer . . .?"

She murmured to herself:

"Till September. . . . July, August. . . . That makes about four months. . . . When you come back from Germany I will tell you. I promise faithfully."

"Not a little sooner?" he asked wistfully.

"Don't press me. Please, please, don't press me. If you knew how grateful I am for your silence all this time, you would not press me now. I am slow, I know, slow and stupid, but I have really been trying. . . ."

"You're a perfect angel," he replied. "It's a bargain then—when I come back from Germany."

"Only," she cried hastily, "you mustn't dash back just to catch me, will you? I mean, when you come back because your work is done or because you are sent for."

"Of course," he answered. "I shall not try to be funny."

As they walked home they talked of other things. At the junction of the Scarthdale and the Stonecliffe roads he took her outstretched hand, but then, as though recalling his good manners, let it fall hastily.

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"Just one more thing. Do your people know, and what do they think?"

"As if I should tell them before I could tell you!"

"I'm sorry. I had no business to imagine it even. But what *would* they think?"

"In a matter of this sort they will think as I do," she answered firmly. And Laddie believed her. Sir Purdon seemed a pitiable obstacle to a determined Janet.

"I told my father," he said.

"And what did he say?"

"I think he felt the first word was yours."

"He's a dear. I'm glad he knows. What a lot of people are waiting for me, aren't they?"

"No. Only one really, Janet—if you can call it waiting. . . ."

"Good-bye," she said quickly, gave him a quick, straight look, a fleeting smile, and with a sudden blush, dropped her eyes and turned away. He watched her out of sight, his heart in his eyes.

"God bless you, child," he whispered, "—and me."

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

I

AND meanwhile Pamela Cartmel was biding her time. Not that she felt the matter very tragically; certainly she suffered no pangs of unrequited love. Her attraction to Laddie, never more than frivolous, had died its natural and inevitable death. But she was angry at her defeat and the unlucky safety-pin, gleaming on her dressing-table, served each morning to keep fresh her smart of failure.

Chance and busybodies played their part. Not very long after the evening at Lady Finedon's, when Laddie first told Janet that he loved her, Pamela ran into the Tawtons at a private view. It was four o'clock and Bertram Tawton, like many good civil servants of those spacious times, preferred to take tea elsewhere than in the office. Also he patronized the lesser arts. Hence his attendance with his wife at the Senefelder Club and the consequent encounter with Mrs. Cartmel.

Half an hour's absorption of lithography was followed by tea and cakes at Rumpelmayers.

"Maurice Lyon was admiring an article of yours the other night—on Conder, I believe. Wasn't it

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Conder, Pansy? He asked who wrote it. I told him."

"Very charming of you, Mr. Tawton. How did you know?"

"The touch was unmistakable. No—as a matter of fact, I had not and have not read it, but a young colleague of yours who was there was so plainly unwilling to reveal the authorship, that I guessed it was the regular art-critic and—well, my knowledge of modern life did the rest."

"So clever of Bertram. He knows all about newspapers. I can't keep them apart—except that delightful Belinda's Book List of Hatchards. So witty always. Bertram won't read it. I don't know why I'm sure."

"Because, my dear, though I am occasionally willing to spend His Majesty's Government's time on other folk's opinions, I am never willing to spend my own money on other folk's books."

"You said there was a colleague of mine . . .?"
Pamela harked back.

"That evening? Yes—a boy called Macallister."

"What was he doing there?"

"Dining, Mrs. Cartmel. Eating, drinking and talking too much. Like Lyon and Pansy and myself. I imagine he was engaged to our hostess's niece. At least they sat together and disappeared after dinner. I know Pansy and I used to do that once. Pure convention. She used to go to bed or powder her nose or feed the chickens and I used to smoke her father's cigars and read Bradshaw in the library. Very romantic."

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"I didn't know Mr. Macallister was engaged," said Pamela with interest. "I must congratulate him. Can you tell me the young lady's name? It will make my felicitations more intelligent."

"Her Christian name is Janet—or at least they called her that. The other name I did not catch. I never listen when I am introduced. It is fortunate I am not an American. They repeat the name, I understand. She is Lady Finedon's niece—you know Lady Finedon, of course?"

"By name, yes. I never met her personally. But I know another niece of hers, Barbara Carnforth."

Bertram Tawton gave his views on the Suffrage question, Mrs. Tawton gave hers on the marzipan and the shoes of a woman at another table, the waitress gave hers on the bill. The party paid and dispersed.

Pamela now set out to cultivate Barbara Carnforth. They lunched; then dined; then even attended a meeting or two together. The simple militant, delighted with the sudden conversion of her brilliant and usually mocking friend, found the rôle of priestess stimulating and agreeable. She urged the claims of a procession.

"I couldn't, Barbara, I simply couldn't. I know it is cowardly and contemptible, but I am not fine enough."

"Of course there are other ways of helping," returned the enthusiast. "Everyone is not fitted for the forefront of the fight."

"Is there anything else I could do?"

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The catalogue of humble usefulness was unattractive. Pamela temporized.

"I will think about it," she said.

Christmas found the new inseparables at Mrs. Cartmel's cottage in the Chilterns. Barbara, when accepting the invitation, had humorously referred to "beechy Bucks." She affected a mockery of catch-words, both in private and on the platform. It kept one topical and tested observation.

Supper on Christmas Eve was festive.

"Have you decided on your service to the Cause?" Barbara asked jestingly.

The gravity of the reply was unexpected.

"It is a strange service, Barbara; a strange and for me a painful one. I will try and explain about it, for I have wrestled with my pride and I believe the humiliation is required of me. The idea arose from something I was told, which curiously enough affects you; and if the deed is to be done, you are the person who must help to carry it out. It appears that a former friend of mine is engaged to a cousin of yours called Janet. I do not know her other name. You have a cousin Janet?"

"Janet Tring—yes. Janet engaged? I had heard nothing. All the same I suspected it. I remember charging her with something of the kind this autumn and she was quite cross. What idiots girls are! Who is the man?"

But Pamela had more questions.

"Tell me about Miss Tring. What is she like?"

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"Oh, one of those put-of-door people with pink and white complexions. Not a little fool by any means but a hopeless innocent."

Miss Carnforth was nothing if not a woman of the world. Her tone invited Pamela to share her pity for the guileless maidens upon whom men wreak their evil will.

"She is then—how shall I put it?—particular? I mean she would assume her lover something of a Paladin?"

"Good gracious, yes! Living in the depths of the country, how should she know anything? But you know the man, Pamela? Is he then not altogether . . .? Who is he?"

"One thing more. Ought we—we women who know and want to help—ought we, even at sacrifice to ourselves, to do our best to show the truth to others who cannot know it?"

"To educate women is our proudest duty," replied Miss Carnforth warmly. "The apathy and ignorance of some women and girls is our greatest obstacle. If there is anything Janet should know that we can tell her, to conceal it would be cruel to her and treason to womanhood!"

Pamela sat quite still, gripping the arms of her chair. She seemed to be forcing herself to a decision. When she spoke, it was in a flat and lifeless voice.

"Very well then, I will tell you. This shall be my contribution. I shall be at your mercy, Barbara—at the mercy of your discretion."

"Pamela, dearest!" said Miss Carnforth. "Be

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brave and tell me everything! We must be perfectly frank and open, woman to woman."

Her voice was charged with sisterly encouragement. Possibly, had Mrs. Cartmel not been the larger of the two, Barbara might have been tempted to extend comforting arms. As it was, she relied on the solemn communion of deep with deep. And Pamela, behind her mask, thanked God for fools.

"Yes, you are right," she said. "I do know the man—only too well. His name is Macallister and he is a member of the *Vanguard* staff. This summer we got very intimate. You can imagine the constant meetings of office life, the common interests, the endless opportunities of privacy. He is attractive, nice-looking and intelligent. I won't overdo his allurements; you will think I am making excuses. I suppose there is no excuse really—at my age. . . ." She swallowed bravely. Her very immobility implied a brushing away of welling tears. "I was a fool and he saw it. Young widows are curiously unprotected, Barbara. . . ." After a moment's silence she looked towards the eager listener. "Need I say any more? It is not a subject I should have chosen—normally."

The little laugh was tragic and courageous.

Miss Carnforth, outwardly profound, was deliciously shocked and flattered. With all the thrill of one who recognizes in the street the man "wanted" for a murder, she remembered seeing Pamela at lunch in a restaurant one day with this very Macallister. The liaison was probably at the

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very time in progress. This was life. Her would-be complicated mind throve on human frailty. Like a reporter, she saw disaster and wickedness as copy. Her interest was not wholly free from pleasure at Janet's coming discomfiture, but this ignoble sentiment was slight beside the glow of righteousness that warmed her propagandist soul. The exact form her next remark ought to take was puzzling. She could hardly treat Pamela to the usual patronizing kindness suitable for an erring sister. Spoken tolerance seemed out of place. She decided to concentrate on the motive that had prompted the disclosure.

"You are very brave to tell me this, Pamela. And all for Janet's sake. Some day she will thank you. At present the thanks must be mine—for Janet and for womanhood. Now good night."

She kissed her noble friend gravely on the forehead and with bent head left the room. Janet's benefactor sighed happily and lit a cigarette.

"Ça marche," she murmured.

II

Miss Garnforth's next duty, that of saving Janet from herself, was fraught with unexpected difficulty. The wronged one was in Yorkshire and seemed inclined to stay there. Letters fishing for an invitation to Scarthdale either remained unanswered or evoked replies which, from their bland

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obtuseness, were worse than nothing. By nature tactless to the point of genius, Barbara had all the love of ceremony characteristic of incompetent conspirators. The solemn news could not be written. To travel north and stay at an inn in Stonecliffe was clearly impracticable. It would look forced, and the irritation it would cause might detract from the gravity of the mission. There was nothing for it but patience. Occasionally Miss Carnforth wondered that the engagement, which was presumably common talk, did not figure in the conversation of Janet's relations. Lady Finedon was wholly unresponsive to hints. It could only be assumed that some gossip, told in confidence, had blurted the secret out. Barbara reflected on the contemptibility of scandal-mongering.

Her distress at the delay was not shared by Mrs. Cartmel, in either her assumed or her real character. She heard of the German journey and noticed that a holiday in the north immediately preceded the departure. Miss Carnforth's disclosure would profit by the absence from England of the central figure; there would be no scope for personal magnetism. So, while sympathising with the bearer of salvation, she simulated shy pleasure at the tardiness of her own shaming and secretly rejoiced that Janet, when the dose was administered, would have no means of appealing directly to the culprit until the poison had begun to work.

In contrast to her rescuers, Janet gave thought

to nothing and to no one, except to the problem and to the personalities that she had undertaken to consider. She was almost pedantically conscientious and her laborious reasoning (which never failed, in its determined honesty, to discriminate against herself) so far succeeded in obscuring the romantic elements of the question that the result, had there been one, would have possessed only logical and therefore academic value. Fortunately, however, her mind was diverted from its useless round of pro- and counter-argument by the arrival at Stonecliffe of Canon Macallister and his daughter.

Laddie had gone to Germany. He seemed interminably far away. June skirled on the vivid green of the valley birches; the lower fells were gemmed with flowers. Skies of tumbled cloud and slashed with tremulous blue tented the ardent pasture-lands. With the spring, Janet's detachment melted. She shrank sometimes from her own imaginings. One night she dreamt of kisses—feather soft, cool under the moon—but their message shocked her to wakefulness and she lay trembling, all the latent force of her intense virginity roused and at bay. At other times the lure came less directly. Bird songs, the cry of a lonely shepherd, even the chatter of a stream would set her pulses leaping. Solitary walks had long been her custom and her absences caused no remark. But whereas in the past she would range the fells with a noisy following of riotous dogs, she now formed the habit of climbing alone to a little

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isolated hill, standing out from the valley-wall beyond the village, and there lying, drawing or reading, on the tight-cropped grass of the plateau that formed its top. The build of the place, like a thousand others in limestone Craven, had the fascination of all natural sophistications. A fringe of little cliffs, some twenty or thirty feet in height, rose with the abruptness of masonry from a steep and stony slope and guarded a tiny tableland of grass and rock. Outcrops of limestone, ranged like giant dice, broke with their eerie regularity the green summit of the hill. An ancient thorn, rhythmically askew, slanted from among their white-grey multitude. Janet would scale the cliffs (a short scree led to a miniature chimney from which grew a mountain ash ; it needed only a sure foot and a reasonable suppleness to squeeze along the gully and over a well-notched rock face to the upper turf) and make her encampment under the hawthorn tree. Sheep-droppings and the texture of the grass showed that the plateau was shared by adventurous members of some moorland flock, but she never encountered one and merely wondered idly which was the route employed.

One limpid day she sat on a rock and drew the mill at Stonecliffe far below. For several days she had pondered and tested the structure of the scene. Laddie had talked interminably of the need of a special formula for every type of landscape, maintaining that essentials in landscape painting are never standardized, that Devonshire trees require a different convention to those in Sussex, that

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the stress and thrust of hill architecture in Wales are not necessarily the same as those of Craven or of Lakeland. She found a strange pleasure now in recalling his chatter, applying his theories ; and it was after a deliberate synthesis that she was groping in this picture of the stark, box-like mill, the river like paper, the five fingers of the larch plantations that sprawled up the violet hill behind. So engrossing was the ruthless elimination of the unessential, that she heard no step or noise and started at a voice, seemingly close in her ear :

“ An intruder indeed ! When did you find out this perfect spot ? ”

“ You did make me jump ! ” laughed Janet.
“ How did you get up ? ”

The Canon smiled knowingly.

“ I think I ought to ask that. I had come to regard this hill as an extension of my study. All my best sermons come from here.”

“ Please don’t turn me out,” she pleaded. “ I do love it so and I didn’t know anyone else ever came—except sheep.”

“ And one elderly parson,” added the Canon.
“ But you are very welcome. May I see the drawing ? ”

Janet tried to explain her method.

“ It is Laddie’s idea,” she concluded incautiously and then, to her mortification, blushed.

The Canon made no comment.

“ This hill is why I called our house Greywethers. You remember the Water of the Wondrous Isles—the valley of the Greywethers ?

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Well, these regiments of stones—so like sheep magically ossified—you see the connection? There is all mediæval superstition in their ordered lifelessness. And I am a hopeless mediævalist."

They sat silent. Janet, to recover her composure, had returned to her drawing. The Canon lit a pipe and brooded over the valley. Sir Purdon, a majestic speck, rode down the lane from Puddock's farm. A few sheep bells tinkled; the caressing breeze sang softly along the rocks. Suddenly, without looking up from her work, Janet said:

"I am very glad Laddie told you about him and me."

"Thank you for being so. I am naturally deeply interested."

"Is it awful of me to talk to you about it?"

"Awful? Why should it be? I am very fond of both of you and him at least I know well. But is there anything I can do?"

"He told me when he . . . when it started . . . I mean when we spoke about it first . . . that he wanted something to hold on to. I'm not sure if I understood. . . ."

For a moment the Canon did not answer. Then he asked, very gently:

"May I speak rather frankly?"

She nodded.

"Laddie is a good fellow—a little selfish perhaps, most sensitive people are—but at the same time over humble in some things. He sees himself, as *he* thinks, clearly, but I suspect that the shadows and the lights are rather capricious and

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sometimes exaggerated. I mean—he is so conscious of himself that he assumes a whole and makes the parts to fit. Do you follow ? ”

Again she nodded.

“ One of his pet theories is instability. He imagines that he is unduly influenced by his surroundings—not in the ordinary way, that would never do (I laugh at him openly for his fear of being ordinary), but in reaction. He is always in opposition. This in itself is more usual than he knows, but that by the way. I think he regards his love for you as something so real that it can be trusted and relied on, a rock foundation, a refuge, call it what you like. So you see he assigns you no merely passive rôle.”

“ But how am I to help ? I am only an ignorant person. I am nothing.”

“ It is not knowledge that is wanted. (Forgive my assuming you have consented ; I do not wish in any way to advise on your decision, merely to state the possibilities as they strike me.) A lot of unhappiness is caused by wives and husbands regarding marriage as the end of effort. Married life needs constant renewal. There need be no end to love, but there may be a very speedy one. Honeymoon rapture passes, but what should follow is more tremendous. It is the task alike of the husband and of the wife to ensure that something should follow and something ever fresh. Laddie’s wife will have to face two dangers. The first is that his rapid, volatile nature, not kept fed, and stimulated, will stray and perhaps get lost.

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The second is connected with the first. There will be many women glad to supplant the wife and take her due, while leaving her responsibilities. He is attractive to women and will for long enough remain so. His wife will have so to keep his love that other women do not exist. And that, as I said, will not be easy."

Janet said nothing and the Canon glanced at her from under his shaggy brows.

"You must not be unhappy, my dear. I am speaking without personal reference. If she did me the honour of asking my opinion, I should say the same to any girl that Laddie really loved. As it happens that he loves you (and I think you can rely on its being genuine), I say it to you. But I am perhaps only an old man talking nonsense." He pulled out his watch. "Half-past twelve! I must run—and no sermon done or . . . I nearly said 'or anything,' but I hope that is not true. Good-bye, Janet. Come and see us sometime."

His departing footsteps on the springy turf made no sound. Janet had not moved. She still stared in front of her, tapping her upper lip absently with her pencil. Of the Canon's words only the, to him, less important remained with her. "He regards his love for you as something so real . . ." "You can rely on its being genuine . . ." Their music thundered in her brain.

"Why me?" she whispered at last and covered her wide eyes with her hands, as though to shut out visions baffling or too tremendous.

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III

The change occurred the following Sunday. Solitary in the corner of the large Tring pew, Janet absorbed the simple beauty of village even-song. Through the narrow lancets, close against which grew yews, wych-elms and scrubby oaks, so little light could penetrate, that along the aisle the yellow oil-lamps dully glowing, contended, as unaided as it were winter time, against the age-long shadows of the tiny church. The second lesson drew to an end and, as she rose with the rest to Christine's call upon the little organ, she gazed with aching heart at the vanished years of careless happiness she and the church had known. Why had she now this feeling of an era closed? Why could she no longer take for granted, part of herself, part of her limpid, virgin life, this low, grey chancel-arch, these walls on whose every roughness the thick light of the oil lamps splashed and stuck like paint? The very pew in which she sat receded, focussed, asked for criticism. And instantly she criticized. It was a box-pew, tall and pale, with dull red cushions and a book-ledge like an angry chin, jutting from the front, too high for kneeling comfort, too low for reading from when upright. On the floor a dull-red, padded box in which the books were kept, on which one knelt. Everything boxlike, shut-in, exclusive. Above all, different from the other pews, which lay in

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friendly low-backed rows along the church. They were the middle ages, genial, accessible, each with its poppy-head, a touch of beauty in the humblest craftsmanship. This arrogant, unpolished penn in which she sat spoke, in its dour conceit, the eighteenth century of snobbery and money greed and dread of joy. How like the Trings it was to follow instinctively the pompous and the retrograde in each succeeding fashion! The stiff, square house that had replaced the rambling, mediæval manor; the stiff, square pew that held itself rigid and lonely among the sombre, mediæval woodwork . . . She checked herself; the analogies became contemporary, undutiful. With bowed head she listened to the Canon's voice at prayer. Her rancour ebbed; the calm of the old church and of the old beliefs soothed her once more to gentle melancholy. The Canon had climbed to the dim, arcaded pulpit. Crouched in her corner she watched the two candles flicker on his nervous hands, on the fine lines of his mouth and chin. His clear, rich voice pierced but did not shatter the shell of her drowsy contentment. He spoke of mutual help, of self-effacement, of the sacrifices, small and great, of normal life. As she listened, Janet heard, more and more clearly, a note of personal appeal. "He is asking *me* to help," she told herself. Each sentence of the sermon seemed a remark addressed to her. From her thoughts of the last few days faded the rosy flush of coming wonder. The future was no longer a tremulous dawning; over a rolling downland, in the hard

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light of a March noon, the road of duty now dipped and narrowed to the horizon. She felt a strength and resolution, which knew no golden dallying, which turned sadly but without emotion from the lure of passionate moons, from the whisper of water in the summer woods. As she stood for the last hymn, her bearing was erect. Her eyes no longer roved over the peasant worshippers, but fixed, with a cold absorption, the altar glowing with its candles under the spun tracery of the east window. The severance between herself and the childhood, of which this church was but a symbol, was complete. Her earlier questionings were answered. She had chosen her path and must not look back. The test came cruelly soon. With scrapings of feet and soft paddings of books replaced, the congregation knelt and sank into uneasy silence. There was a pause and then the benediction. "The peace of God which passeth all understanding. . . ." The Canon's voice sounded infinitely far away. She saw him, in imagination, a tiny figure at the end of a vista of soaring arches. The beautiful words sang with the poignancy of a last farewell to the simple, unreflecting past. For several minutes she knelt, her head buried in her arms, stifling the sobs that choked her. The village-folk clattered out into the magic dusk.

When self-control returned, she rose from her knees and groped stupidly for gloves and scarf. With a start she saw Christine, standing in the aisle at the door of the pew and smiling gently to her.

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"Come and have supper with us," Christine whispered.

The two girls left the church and walked in silence through the village to the old hall. Janet had regained her mood of quiet determination. At supper she responded easily and cheerfully to the talk and laughter of her hosts. But in their manner, in their eyes, she read once more that hint of pleading, that had transformed the sermon into a direct appeal from the Canon to herself. Her heart went out to them. She, who felt so strong, would help them. They needed her; the clergyman with his reputation and his learning, Christine with her competence and her tireless well-doing, looked to her, Janet, for what she alone could give them. The sense of power, the pride of giving, buttressed her resolution. As she walked the two homeward miles of moorland road, with only the stars and the night wind for company, she forced herself to accept, as compensation for the might-have-been, the arid triumph that is the reward of a deliberate sacrifice of dreams to duty.

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"Aunt May and Uncle Daniel would like you to go and stay with them," said Lady Tring from the depths of her breakfast-table correspondence.

Janet reflected a moment.

"All right," she replied, "I'll go on Thursday."

Lady Tring sighed. The girl was very odd. For weeks she had been saying daily that Scarthdale

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was the best place in the world, that she would stay there all the summer, that no one was to be asked to visit her. And now without a moment's warning, she proposed to dash off to Surrey, to a house full of young people, to all the scurry of restlessness of a well-to-do outer suburb. The stepmother, as always, abandoned the problem of Janet's why and wherefore, but her bewilderment claimed the tribute of a sigh.

"Very well, dear," she said resignedly. "Will you write?"

The *volte-face* was certainly complete, for Uncle Daniel was Barbara Carnforth's father and Aunt May was Barbara Carnforth's mother and it was inevitable that a visit to them was not only a visit to Barbara Carnforth's numerous brothers and sisters, but also to Barbara Carnforth herself. And yet Janet had gone to considerable pains to keep Barbara at arm's length for the last six months. The decision to go to Weybridge, taken in that few moments of rapid thought after her stepmother's announcement, was based primarily on a desire for bustle and gaiety. Obscurely there was a feeling for the last meal before execution. "One crowded hour. . . ." Almost as trite as that. Deeper than this and, for obvious reasons, unacknowledged, was a longing for distraction. When the ice is thin, skating is not intricate but rapid and instinctive. Finally, the dread of intruders that had kept her isolated on the moors, had vanished with the wish for privacy. There was now no sanctuary to keep inviolate.

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River House, Weybridge, was indubitably the last place in which to look for privacy and an ideal antidote for one weary of solitude. In structure and appearance it expressed perfectly the life it sheltered. Large and rather new, its red-brick walls were heavily latticed with black putty to emphasize the mortar lines. Its white bow-windows, white balconies, white barge-boards; its lawns and gravel paths; its standard-roses, pergolas, summer-houses, rockeries, its tennis-lawn and croquet-lawn; its hammock, its boat-house, its bright rough-cast garage with sham beams painted on the gable of the chauffeur's rooms above; its every feature of brisk, unthinking, modern love of comfort and of pleasure, revealed the tastes and occupations of its busy inmates. For the Carnforths were always busy; they had a supreme contempt for idleness, whether of aristocrat or bohemian. The three morning trains to London between half-past eight and half-past nine had each its Carnforth. Roger, the second son, took the 8.48; Harry, the eldest son, took the 9.7; Daniel Carnforth, the father, took the 9.26. One after the other they breakfasted, hurried to the station, worked with cheerful violence at sugar-broking, insurance-broking and stock-broking, lunched separately and well, worked again and, more often than not, all returned by the same train for dinner at 7.45. Meanwhile from River House Mrs. Carnforth ran the local branch of the Tariff Reform League as secretary and the local branch of the Y.W.C.A. as chairwoman and

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the Woking School for Mothers as the most active member of the committee. Viola ordered the meals and controlled the servants and battled amicably with her mother for the use of the motor. Patience languished during the daylight hours of week-days (except Saturday afternoon) for the want of stimulating male society; Ethel and Peter, when at school, wrote home for money and, when at home, added to the general confusion by falling out of the punt and climbing the roof of the garage and losing the tennis-balls and the croquet mallets and incessantly endeavouring, undetected, to play "fives" on the billiard table. Finally there was Barbara, who, from her austere and prophetic hostel in Bloomsbury, made frequent stormy appearances, her week-ends beginning with severe physical exercise and ending with equally severe spiritual conflict with her father and mother over things political.

On this foundation of family energy was built a superstructure of constant visitors. Lady Finedon (Mrs. Carnforth's sister) would loom upon Weybridge, when any function occurred sufficiently intellectual to attract her already much-involved attention. Barbara would introduce the latest and most outrageous champions of woman's rights. The boys had endless friends—school and college—who liked pretty girls and good tennis and billiards and dancing and found them all at River House. So life swept on its way and the Carnforths with it, in a breathless scramble of eating, sleeping, train catching, local politics, golf,

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tennis-parties, garden-parties, river-parties, motor-parties, matinees, dressmakers, dances, billiards, theatricals, and going to church, while Daniel Carnforth merrily and conventionally made more money, and Harry wished Angela Vickers would marry him and Roger hoped to God she wouldn't, and Viola adored the only young genius the district could produce, and Patience was pursued by every young man for miles except the genius, who pursued nothing but art and royalties, and the pleasant pine trees of the neighbourhood smiled their kindest and gave off their sunniest fragrance as background to the prosperity and genial security of this so utterly English scene.

Such was the whirlpool of activity into which Janet, on the appointed Thursday, dropped undismayed. The two young Carnforths were at school. Barbara was in London. The only visitor was a Mrs. Murray, a reserved, grey-haired lady, apparently an old friend of the family. The first evening was comparatively peaceful. Friday, among other features, comprised a tennis-party in Byfleet and an impromptu dance in the evening held at the house of an unsuspecting family, with a large and easily emptied hall. At nine o'clock Janet found herself one of a band of cloaked and excited figures, loaded with bottles and food, clustering round the darkened porch of the unconscious host. Intimacy with the Carnforths and their set meant this kind of thing and the startled owner of the house, as soon as he grasped the situation, joined eagerly enough in the work of rolling

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up the rugs. The festivity ended at one o'clock. Janet wondered how the servants liked it.

Barbara arrived on Saturday afternoon. She greeted Janet with a slightly commiserating gravity that was rather funny and quite unaccountable. It was a hot day and tennis was only bearable after tea. Some preferred a punt and a shady willow. There seemed an incredible number of guests; at every turn one met a stranger— young men in perfect flannels, girls in very short, white skirts. Janet slid contentedly on the current of promiscuous jollity. One or two of the young men wavered in their allegiance to Patience; this cousin with the yellow hair seemed to understand a fellow. In other words she was too little interested to trouble to pull a fellow's leg. But they did not put it that way, and basked in the grave courtesy of Janet's indifference, their commonplace minds mistaking oblivion for respect and sympathy.

By bedtime she felt that her self-prescribed mental drug was working well. This life was just what she required. Scarthdale and the Canon and . . . oh, and Aunt Isabel's dinner-party . . . faded, with their problems and their self-denials, out of their troublesome urgency into distance. She came down to Sunday morning breakfast serene and off her guard. Unprepared therefore for sudden shocks from unexpected quarters, and what quarter could have been more unexpected than quiet Mrs. Murray?

"I don't think I *could* go and live in America,"

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she said without warning and to no one in particular.

"Well then, Mary, I shouldn't do so," replied Mrs. Carnforth briskly. "Some marmalade please, Roger."

"But Philip shows no inclination to come home, and here is one of his greatest friends writing to advise my going over there. Writes from Germany too——" (Janet had a momentary sense of something pending) "——just to tell me that. Very thoughtful of him. Such a nice boy. I suppose you don't know Ian Macallister, do you, May?"

The warning had been too short. The start was too unforeseen. Janet dropped her fork with a clatter, lost her head and felt herself blushing furiously. With an effort she recovered and simulated a choke. Harry hit her on the back, obligingly.

"Thank you," she smiled. "I'm so sorry; these admirable sausages made me greedy."

But as she threw her apology round the sympathetic table, she noticed Barbara watching her with eager and strangely shining eyes.

The chief glory of Weybridge was the stretch of woodland known as St. George's Hills, and to these hills Janet and three others rode on bicycles that Sunday afternoon. Leaving the machines at the gate-lodge, they struck up the sandy drive and soon came to a marshy pool, given a number of sensational names by would-be legend founders, but in itself only a reed-fringed mere, with forest

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growing to the banks and gentle slopes of trodden pine-needles shading palely to nothing between the red-brown trunks of the close-planted trees. Roger and Patience wandered off to look for a monkey tree, on which grew monstrous cones. They had not lived in Weybridge long enough to have become blasé over cones, and the less ordinary varieties were still a source of interest. Janet and Barbara sat on a fallen trunk and watched the pond-flies skimming the surface of the water, the black-green tree-tops reflected slumbrously in the unbroken mirror of the pool. Barbara spoke suddenly :

“ Janet, is it true you are proposing to marry this Mr. Macallister ? ”

Unexpected perhaps, but Janet was no longer lulled in a false security. She answered immediately and rather wearily :

“ Yes—I think so.”

Barbara prodded the pine-needles nervously with her toe. She picked up a fir-cone and threw it towards the pond. It lighted on the water with a gentle splash and remained floating, while the ripples caused by its fall widened and died, temporarily disorganizing the gyrations of the skating insects. Janet glanced at her cousin's face ; Barbara was clearly embarrassed. This unusual fact served as a tonic ; something interesting might be going to happen, not merely tiresome arguments, demands for explanation.

“ Well,” she asked, “ what about it ? ”

“ I think you ought to know—— ” began

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Barbara slowly, and her manner had a hesitation wholly foreign to her nature, "that he . . . that you are not . . . I mean that you will not be . . . the first."

Janet had watched her cousin's struggles with growing amusement. The mouse produced by such a mountain of embarrassment set her laughing outright. It was so utterly reminiscent of romantic platitude—"My first and only love. . . ." Or was Barbara bringing a charge of bigamy? That would be even funnier.

"Not the first? What in the world do you mean?"

"Of course, if you are going to laugh——" began Barbara huffily, but checked herself and went on speaking at a great rate: "That I can tell you at all is due to the noble generosity of the woman in question. Indeed—it is with her full consent that I can warn you against this dissolute young man. I could not bear to think of you, so pure and innocent, giving yourself to anyone soiled with such beastliness. Heaven knows, it happens often enough, but here was a case in which I could do something and I am only doing my duty. . . ."

Duty again, thought Janet, grimly. The connection of ideas gave her a sudden perspective. She realized Barbara was serious, that Laddie had had recently a liaison with some woman, that the woman had told Barbara—— All her better instincts, all the feelings that she had crushed down in the interests of what she conceived to be her

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sacrifice of self, all the longings that had, on the close grass of the rocky plateau, seemed at last to catch a glimpse of their fulfilment, rose within her and grasped at this link in the chain of reasoning. "This woman had told Barbara." No woman could or would tell such a thing. It was a lie.

"I don't believe a word of it," she said quietly, and hardly knew that she had spoken.

Barbara had expected this, had even visualized herself in the rôle of tender comforter. She laid her hand on Janet's knee.

"But it's true, Janet. I'm terribly sorry, but it's true. I can prove it, if you won't believe."

The earnest tones flowed like an icy stream round Janet's momentary exaltation. She shrank back into the defensive hardness of her self-inflicted task. Once more the tremors and intoxications of impending mystery stiffened into the hateful resolution that had come to her during the Canon's sermon a week ago. She was to come forward and support the weak. Was it then reasonable, was it sane, to look for strength? This ugliness unveiled by Barbara was the very ogre she had come out to fight. Its existence only justified her all the more.

"Even if you prove it," she said, a little unsteadily, "it makes no difference. But I should like it proved," she added painfully, "and I should like to see the . . . woman."

Then, rising quickly to her feet, she walked away into the wood, leaving a genuinely astonished Barbara motionless on the fallen tree.

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IV

Mrs. Cartmel heard the story out in silence.

"She said it would make no difference!" repeated Barbara in despair. "I can't understand it—and in such a queer, dead voice. She can't have realized. Janet would have a fit at such a thing. And then to want to see you. . . ."

Pamela nodded but did not speak. She was thinking hard. What did it mean? Then this request for a meeting was awkward. She was not in the least afraid that Janet, once her protagonist's identity was clear, would urge her lover to take action for slander. Such crudities were below them all. But she hesitated to present herself to the keen gaze of this strange, young girl. Might not some virginal instinct enable Janet to pierce the accuser's disguise, to judge—possibly from some trifling external—that the story was a lie? Very awkward. The pin should have been enough. The pin and Barbara's word. But there seemed no help for it. She would have to dress for the part, rehearse a little.

"It is sweet of you, Barbara dear, to want to spare me. I had hoped this would not be necessary. but, as it is, I will go through with it. Bring your cousin here one afternoon and I will give her the proof she wants."

Barbara left Cheyne Walk with a solemn veneration for her friend's loftiness of character and a

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confirmed pride in her own power of making converts to the cause.

V

When Barbara had returned to London, Janet, as best she might, joined once more in the tempestuous life of River House. She hoped to find considerable comfort in Roger Carnforth who, as almost her own age, had been her intimate in childhood and was not yet so dazzled by the adult splendours of suburban life as to find childhood reminiscences an irritation. Often, in the evening, while Harry and his father played their hundred-up and when, for some interposing reason, they were not required for drawing-room bridge, she and Roger would gossip of the old times, at Scarthdale, in London where the Carnforths used to live, and elsewhere. Roger, though in a very mild degree, shared his suffragist sister's interest in revolution. But whereas in Barbara the spirit of rebellion grew, nurtured by Bloomsbury and a desperate throng of cocoa-drinking woman-thinkers, in Roger it was slowly dying, stifled by the opulent correctness of his city office, of his typical suburban home. Less and less he said, or even thought, what had not before and must not in the future be said or thought by those who are the backbone of the empire. Janet, with her intriguing blend of naïveté and reserve, tempted him, now and again, to statements and aspirations, which he

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would never in more normal company have uttered or wished to utter. She, unable fully to realize that his words were to her often mere patrols and did not necessarily imply, close behind them, the advancing army of his thought, credited him with greater breadth of view, a more mature philosophy than was really his. And this fault of judgment led to an incident which marked the beginning of the third and final phase of her relations with Laddie.

They were talking, as boys and girls always do when they feel intimate and serious, of love and sex.

"I certainly think," declared Roger impressively, "that a man should allow a girl the freedom he claims for himself. I'm with old Barbara there. Seems rotten to have one law for the man—you know."

"But Barbara would make general the law at present applied to the girl. Would you agree to that?"

He laughed self-consciously. Perhaps a breath of first-class smokers, of club etiquette, ruffled the composure of his wisdom.

"You can't be doctrinaire about it," he protested. "After all, the cases aren't quite the same, are they? I mean not in *everything*. Going about and smoking and voting and all that—of course they are parallel enough but—well, you wouldn't have women staying about at hotels alone, would you?"

"It's nothing to do with me, goose. I am asking

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for *your* opinion. Tell me, do men think it very wrong to . . . to . . . have affairs with women they are not going to marry ? ”

Roger was shocked. Convention demanded that he should be. At the same time convention recommended, as the proper attitude for men in his position, an assumption of worldliness. He was mildly jocular.

“ Really, Janet, I may be old-fashioned. . . . Fancy you worrying about a thing like that. My dear girl—you can’t possibly understand. It’s not the least use worrying—— ”

Inspiration left him. He sought for means of escape.

“ By Jove, it’s half-past nine ! Promised to ring up Jack Weatherall ! ”

He vanished towards the telephone. But Janet sat thinking ; dully, laboriously thinking. Evidently Roger regarded occasional “ affairs ” as natural and excusable. If Roger’s kind thought this and if this story about Laddie was true—— True ? Of course it was true ; hadn’t Barbara promised to prove it ? Hadn’t she herself believed it readily, with a kind of inverted gladness, as making solid and more real the enemy to be overthrown ? *As* Roger’s kind thought this and *as* Laddie had acted in this way, was it peculiar to him at all ? Was he even a specially sensitive brand to be snatched from the flame of his one and only weakness ? Why save him ? Probably he thought it the regular thing ; probably he would laugh secretly, if he knew the pother this

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trifling question had caused, alike to his father and to her. Would he laugh secretly at her? Had she merely been fooled, like the girls Barbara raved against, fooled by an ordinary man? All this talk of sacrifice. . . . Heroics over nothing, nothing.

Not stirring she sat in the arm-chair, her very soul in ashes. All warmth was dead; even the grudging warmth of hateful duty; everything was cold and useless and . . . and finished. She bowed her head in her arm and cried for very weariness.

Someone touched her shoulder.

"What is it, child? What is the matter?"

The shoulders grew calmer but the girl did not raise her head. Mrs. Murray went to the door, locked it and, returning, sat on the arm of the chair and stroked the golden hair.

"Stay quite quietly. No one will come. Have the cry out."

Gradually the tears subsided and Janet's mind began slowly to work again. She realized the old lady sitting beside her, she felt the gentle hand upon her hair. There came over her an irresistible longing to tell this old lady all about it, or something about it: . . . no, all about it. . . .

Without looking up, and her voice was still husky with tears, she asked:

"May I tell you? I am so lonely—— There is no one to tell. And you know him. . . ."

Mrs. Murray continued softly to stroke the bowed head.

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"Whatever you like, child, if I can help you. . . . Perhaps just the telling of it will help you."

And Janet stumbled through the simple tale. It sounded pathetically young and its terrors mainly those of the inarticulate, but the old lady was wise and made no comment on the past.

"I know Laddie very well, my dear. He was my son's best friend at Oxford. I am quite, quite sure—if this thing is true—that he regrets it more bitterly than anyone else can do. You are right to want the proof, but do not judge hastily. When you tell me that you only decided to marry him because it was your duty, and that now it does not seem even to be that, I cannot see the cause for tears. You have not lost much. Is it not rather a deliverance? If matters really stand like that, the incident is closed. But one does not cry as you were crying over problems of the mind and that is why I ask you not to judge too hastily. Remember, he is away and cannot defend himself. Finally," she bent low and murmured in the girl's ear, "would it not be wise to make *quite* sure that duty is the only common ground between you?"

VI

July was drawing on before Pamela allowed Barbara Carnforth to fix a day for the proving of Laddie's guilt. The delay was to Janet, at times intolerable, at times a matter of indifference. After

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her tears and Mrs. Murray's words, the riotous publicity of River House jarred more and more. She wanted to think, where was no place for thought. A few days tossed and clattered by and she could bear the noise no longer. A secret trunk-call from the local call-box, a letter from Campden Hill to Mrs. Carnforth, and Janet left for London, at the special request of Lady Finedon (who was always in London in July), to help with certain rather vaguely specified activities that had, it appeared, assumed a sudden and unexpected urgency.

The day arrived for Janet—the day of summons to hear the charge against her lover. With the numb foreboding hitherto connected in her mind with an impending dentist, she walked with Barbara along the swelter of the riverside. Her mind was now rigid in defence of Laddie.

“You must tell me her name, Barbara.”

“Yes, now I will. Her name is Mrs. Cartmel.”

With horrible urgency there flashed into Janet's mind the dinner-party at Lady Finedon's, the little Jew with his praise of some article or other, Laddie's hesitation in naming the writer. But hardly had this memory shattered her fierce desire to disbelieve, than there came another, which, by implication, challenged the cause of her despair, challenged even her cousin's honesty. Barbara had told her once of seeing Laddie with a woman, a woman she described as the sort that runs after men. That woman was Mrs. Cartmel. The incident at dinner had proved it. Since when was

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Barbara an intimate of this man-hunter? Her mind see-sawed between utter depression and incoherent hope. She turned to Barbara on the doorstep.

"I am going in alone. Do not wait."

Miss Carnforth made no protest. She was struck by the fact that Pamela had urged a similar arrangement.

"We must meet alone, Barbara. You are a dear, good creature and some time we shall both be grateful for all you have done, but for Miss Tring's sake and mine there must be no third person."

It was disappointing. The dramatic situation appealed. But, as there was no help for it, Barbara let her cousin enter the house and then walked thoughtfully away.

Janet was received in a heavily darkened room. A woman rose from a couch and, standing with her back to the light, said in a gentle, melancholy voice :

"Come in, Miss Tring. Please forgive drawn blinds. My eyes are very weak and I cannot stand this strong sunlight."

Janet stood by the door. The room was simple and bare. Mrs. Cartmel had spent a busy morning removing the pictures and cushions. Also some of the books.

The tired voice began again :

"I have no more desire than you to prolong this interview. On the table is a safety-pin. I think if you ask Mr. Macallister where he lost it, you will

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have the proof that you require. My maid can witness that she found it on the floor in this flat one morning before breakfast. Now—go please.”

The shadowy figure sank on to the sofa again and hid her face with her hand. Janet took up the pin and placed it in her glove. She was barely conscious of the action; only the hard, cold outline of the pin against her palm told her, as she clenched her hand, that this was real and not an evil dream. She felt no pity for this woman; merely a dull dislike. The light was so dim she could not see her clearly, only a pale face and simply braided hair, a drooping figure in a plain, light-coloured gown. Her hostility was instinctive, an antagonism of psychology, but it had no reality on which to feed. As for the charge against Laddie and whether it were proved. . . . Her spirit seemed to be falling from misery to misery. Barbara's inconsistency was forgotten. The story was too complete, too hideously simple. She could not but believe it and the belief was an agony. He had done this and the fact was no longer natural and trifling, no longer a recognized addition to a burden she had assumed, was not even cause for anger. It was sheer agony and desolation because, as in this moment she realized wholly and for ever, she loved him.

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

I

IN the meantime, for Laddie himself, background, foreground and wings were Germany. Germany urban rather than Germany rural; Saxony, Bavaria, Prussia and Rhineland. His way from London led him more or less directly to Leipzig, to the nominal opening of the exhibition. There he found vast preparations, a sort of embryo grandeur; but in the littered grounds half-finished buildings lay grotesquely incomplete, one wall a skeleton of girders, another already blistered with the ineffectual ornament that industrial prosperity has chosen for its periodical bouts of self-advertisement. He was surprised to find the British section, not only among the most advanced but conceived in sober and effective taste. The low pavilion, designed like an Elizabethan college—mullions and battlements and Tudor oriel—stood, primly enough, among its formal lawns, and by its self-contained simplicity expressed, better than any speech could do, the exquisite reserve which lies behind and underneath the surface commonness of modern Englishry.

It was the second or third day after his arrival

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that he encountered Dacre. Passing the fine art section of the French exhibit, he paused at a half-filled screen of etchings—Forain, Steinlen, a few Carrière lithographs.

“Odd—these repeated meetings,” said a voice behind him.

Dacre was sardonically smiling, but something of that inevitable freemasonry which, in a foreign land, draws together nationals who, at home, would lift their heads and pass each other by, drew the two Englishmen into quite amicable talk.

“Now I think of it,” said Laddie, as they sat in the office of the French exhibiting committee, “I was told in London you had joined Massenot, Conrobert. I suppose that brings you here?”

Dacre nodded and explained that his firm, important lithographers as well as dealers in prints, were large exhibitors alike of collectors’ treasures and of commercial reproduction-work. He was in charge of their stall; expected to stay in Germany till July.

During the next few days the two grew almost intimate. Pamela Cartmel was mentioned, but briefly. Then Laddie, realizing he must return to Leipzig when the show was properly complete, started to follow up the lines of enquiry laid down by Postlethwaite’s need of machinery. This primarily involved a knowledge of the technical elements and he worked hard and late, at books, talking to German mechanics, studying recent models. Such necessary absorption he welcomed. Never able to forget that Janet’s answer tarried

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on these months abroad, he sought every means of hastening time and certainly, in varied and fascinating work, the weeks passed rapidly enough.

Then, with all its unrealized applications, the murder of the Archduke Francis Ferdinand jarred Germany to momentary excitement. Laddie was in Barmen when the news arrived ; the Kollwitz machine-shops were near Oberhausen, and a pause in a strenuous apprenticeship had given an opportunity to take a day or two of holiday. Walking to the station of the monorail-overhead that winds, suggestive of some monstrous survival of prehistoric days, along the deep cleft into which Elberfeld and Barmen are wedged, he heard cries and sounds of running feet. In a main street newsvendors shouted from a thrusting crowd of broad, black backs. A paper, secured with difficulty, devoted its single sheet to the sensational event. Laddie, like most of his countrymen, was no student of European politics. He watched with interest and amusement the gesticulating talkers in the railway car, as it slid uncannily above the filthy stream, swaying from side to side, suspended foolishly from its electric rail. They were a typical German business crowd, many of them Jews who spoke among themselves in soft and anxious voices. A few square-faced Prussians seemed to gloat secretly beneath their horror and rough denunciations of the Serbs. Laddie wished he knew more of the murdered man. A naïve impulse led him to turn and ask his neighbour :

“ Can you explain to me what this Archduke

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stood for? We are not told these things in England."

He was addressing a small, pale youth with a clipped moustache and large, round spectacles, who clasped to his shabby overcoat a limp, black leather portfolio. Weak and kindly eyes, under the brim of the black slouch hat, peered surprisedly at this strange young foreigner, who, as though borrowing a match, asked huge and complicated questions in a tram.

"You are an Englishman? Your German is too good for that. You must be a Swede."

"Indeed I'm not!" laughed Laddie. "Much less select."

The young German made no attempt to understand this levity. He continued to stare gravely and anxiously at his questioner.

"As for the Archduke," he went on, "I cannot tell you what you want in one or two or even twenty sentences. It is a great problem, the Austro-Hungarian. Who knows what this crime will lead to? If you are interested, I shall be glad to explain what I can. But perhaps you are pressed for time?"

"Not in the least. I have to be in Oberhausen again to-morrow afternoon. I thought of going to Hagen for the night."

"I also go to Hagen. We will dine together. My name is Mylius."

Even in the throng that descended the staircase from the railway terminus the little German checked himself and bowed slightly. If he clicked

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his heels, the sound was lost in the scraping of many hurrying, long-toed boots.

Laddie introduced himself. During the short train journey the acquaintanceship grew rapidly. Mylius had the national bent for giving personal information. He was secretary to a rich manufacturer who patronized the arts ; his parents were small farmers in Silesia ; by obtaining his doctorate he had entered a world above that into which he had been born ; he had achieved one of those painful miracles of self-training which, though rare enough in any country, are rarest of all in Germany where the educational system is the greatest ally of class barriers. He had visited Barmen for the same reason as Laddie—to see the exhibition of some Westphalian *Über-Secession*, whose violent paintings and unbridled handicrafts had found temporary asylum in a dilapidated school of art, forgotten among the grimy squalor of the Wupper valley. Laddie must come and visit the employer, who lived in a wonderfully beautiful house, designed by the great Crasemann himself, on the outskirts of Hagen. It appeared that the enlightened man welcomed all foreigners interested in modern art. Mylius hoped that Laddie would be able to suggest sympathetic groups and individuals in England, with whom connections could be formed.

“It is so hard to get into touch with artistic circles in England,” he sighed. “You are so reserved.”

“We aren’t really,” replied Laddie, “only

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rather shy and lazy and unable to take seriously matters of the mind."

They dined in a restaurant on a narrow, noisy thoroughfare of Hagen in Westphalia. Electric trams clanged over the cobbles; drays blundered awkwardly along, blotting out with their swaying bulk the bright lights of the tobacconist, the *delicatessen* shop and the *Kientopp*, glittering on the other side of the mean, ungerman street.

The walk to the famous Crasemann house did nothing to alter the impression of Hagen as a sordid and untidy town. Laddie commented on the absence of broad shining pavements, of towering office-blocks, of cleanliness and evidence of municipal enlightenment. Mylius shrugged his shoulders.

"In effect, if not in fact, we are off the highway here," he said, with a sad smile that seemed his nearest approach to laughter. "No international pilgrims stop at Hagen on their way. We are here to produce and to work and that without onlookers or admirers. Why should we trouble to window-dress? You are thinking of Düsseldorf or Heidelberg. Those are places to which you foreigners quite naturally go. You are not catered for in Hagen—or in Barmen-Elberfeld, as perhaps you noticed!"

"Here at least is one," thought Laddie, "who can criticize his countrymen."

Commerzienrat Kahn-Lortzing received the stranger cordially. His ornate politeness and a tinge of fullness about the upper lip set Laddie

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wondering where the second barrel of the surname came from. Perhaps from Imperial largesse, for the great man lost no time in intimating that a special dispensation of the Emperor had admitted the heir to the Kahn-Lortzing fortune to the commissioned ranks of the Prussian army.

This privilege once explained (probably according to solemn ritual), the millionaire enthusiast lost no time in displaying to an appreciative guest the wonders of his home. He cannot be blamed for confounding what was sincere in that appreciation and what was not. Laddie, an adept at polite hypocrisy, was as cordial in admiration of the house as of the skilfully selected treasures it contained. The latter, chosen no doubt by Mylius, formed one of those coherent and historically sensitive collections which the influence of von Tschudi had made plentiful in Germany. The pictures ranged from Siennese primitives to Gauguin and Cézanne. Each intermediate stage was determined with logic and taste. Portfolios of drawings, etchings, lithographs by the young men of the day—German, French, Russian, even a few English—revealed the method by which would-be members of the collection proper were put to apprenticeship before being finally selected. There followed a display of Chinese, Japanese, Persian and Indian art; then primitive idols from America and the Southern Seas; native and peasant pottery; wood and stone carvings. The profusion of possessions bewildered and finally sated.

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And all the while Kahn-Lortzing murmured praises of Crasemann, expounded the genius of Germany's greatest architect, hymned the originality of this unique residence, the master's latest and most inspired work. It was certainly original. The building was shaped like an open fan (the front door at the handle corner); corridors and rooms radiated, gradually widening, to east, south and west. It seemed fortunate that Crasemann also undertook interior decoration, as no normal furniture of any clime or epoch could have battled either with the shape or with the embellishments of the resulting rooms. Darkness veiled the beauties of the exterior, but the tireless innovations in ceilings, fireplaces, doorways and staircase gave promise of an outside elevation of no ordinary kind. When at last, wearied with the sight of beautiful things, Laddie was unable longer to fight off the depression caused by the eccentricities of this appalling structure, he pleaded fatigue and excused himself. Mylius, who accompanied him to the hotel, regretted that there had not been time to see the collection of modern poster-work (all mounted on cardboard and kept in steel racks, ready at a moment's notice to be packed and circulated to this or that industrial exhibition in Germany, Austria, Bulgaria or Italy); the jewelery cabinets; the section devoted to modern town architecture and planning. . . .

"Good heavens!" shouted Laddie at last. "Why, with this immense wealth, this endless lust for knowledge, this patient acquisition of taste,

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this genuine, civic spirit—are you not masters of the world? Or are you . . . really?”

Mylius shook his head.

“I hope we never shall be. You have seen only one end. The Herr Commerzienrat is not a Prussian. He pretends imperialism—but that is *richesse oblige*. He loves the *idea* of art. It pleases him to help. . . .”

“And you guide the hand that gives . . . ?”

The deprecating gesture was rather lovable.

“I am a poor student and I believe in beauty more than in national pride. That is why I am so sorry we cannot get into touch with England to help us with these collections. The Herr Commerzienrat is generous and unselfish. His things can be seen or used by anyone.”

“Why does he live in that ghastly house?” asked Laddie bluntly.

“Ghastly? You do not like it? It is German and maybe we Germans are not builders as you English like them.”

“But, my friend, how can you reconcile that nightmare of feverish affectation with your department stores, your railway stations, your municipal offices? Are they not German too? There may, in America, be things as good, but nothing in Europe can compare with them for directness, good sense and exquisite proportion.”

“We are a practical people,” replied Mylius simply.

And there the matter ended. Only as he lay in bed did Laddie remember the Archduke Francis

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Ferdinand and the chance enquiry in the Barmen overhead that had produced this absorbing but utterly non-political evening of experience. He marvelled that Kahn-Lortzing had not mentioned the crime at all. "Truly a wonderful people," he thought. But he soon realized that what had seemed a dilettante idealism was in truth actuality and that in devoting his evening to educating a foreigner in the catholic perceptiveness of German taste, the millionaire had been serving his fatherland. In the right company art becomes *Realpolitik*. Laddie consoled himself by thinking that he had never blundered into regarding the Germans as fools.

As July progressed, the commotion caused by the Bosnian murder died deceptively away. Europe resumed its normal round. Cosmopolitan snobbery filled the watering places; Oxford and Cambridge dons, full of petulant energy and over-prone to quoting tags of verse, trickled through Germany towards the Dolomites. Laddie left Oberhausen and returned via Magdeburg to Leipzig. There was an influential group of Social Democrats at Magdeburg, eager to exchange a monthly letter with the *Vanguard*, a commentary on politics in England and Germany, a link between two friendly peoples. They urged a visit to Breslau, but Laddie refused.

"Later, perhaps," he said. "When I am done at Leipzig."

July 23rd found him once more at the Inter-

national Exhibition. The undertaking had been for weeks in full career. Crowds had attended. But the people that thronged the grounds the first day of his return were excited over matters quite unconnected with the admirably arranged exhibits in the various pavilions. The Austrian ultimatum had superseded printing and allied trades. The war fever had begun obscurely to work.

Though far from diagnosing the complaint, Laddie soon felt the effects of the general symptoms. Business was impossible. The men he visited were over-strained or depressed or listlessly remote. The atmosphere of Leipzig changed from one of competent energy to a blend of irritation and furtive gloom. Dacre had gone to England. The officials of the British section were non-committal but anxious. The newspapers appeared too frequently. Now and again, in crowded restaurants, little spurts of rowdiness would bear witness to widespread nervous tension. There was an ugly incident one evening on the Rathaus square—a Russian in a crowded tram had hustled an officer; there had been a blow and the smouldering anger of the mob had flamed out for one savage flicker of time. Saturday saw the garbled publication of the Serbian reply to Austria. A letter from Mylius offered, if not release, at least a counter irritant to the prevailing malaise. The little secretary was going to Berlin. The Herr Commerzienrat was anxious to acquire a lacquer screen, due to be sold by auction on the 29th. Was there a hope of seeing the friend Macallister?

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Laddie decided to go to Berlin. He was wrought up and restless. Telegraphing a new address to Postlethwaite, he took the night express. The new Leipzig terminus towered over him as he walked to catch his train. The soaring lines of the facade were white under the arc lights ; between the plain piers of masonry rectangular strips of shadow brought to the pattern of the whole a contribution of sombre dignity ; within, towering halls, barely finished platforms and, high above him, coldly patient glass arcading embodied, as in a casket, the spirit of industrial Germany, a spirit aspiring but realist that neither despises beauty nor worships it, but acknowledges the power of good taste over bad and allows no prejudice nor idleness to thwart the union of perfection and utility.

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He sat with Mylius, shaded from the sun-glare, on the terrace of the Café Fürstenhof, watching the traffic of the Potsdamer Platz. The roadway shone like polished steel. In the uneasy heat tram-cars jerked and screeched over the points ; purring motors slithered to and fro ; bells clanged, horns sounded, while the dense crowds swarmed over the square, crushing unwillingly to left and right as the insistent traffic nosed along its way. It was Thursday, July the thirtieth, that day of sudden lull in the hectic clamour of the Berlin streets. Mylius's auction had been held the day before. The buyers had barely numbered fifty ; prices had crashed ; the screen was bought for something

purely nominal. There had been rumours of postponement, but the rigid Prussian sense of carrying out instructions does not lend itself to rapid alteration. The sale had taken place. The few intrepid buyers had secured the bargains of a lifetime. And outside, in the torrid streets, drunken crowds had howled for war.

His duty done, Mylius seemed crushed and shrunk. With Laddie he had mingled in the evening throng, pushing a way past Wertheim to the Friedrichstrasse, up to the limes and glare of Unter den Linden, round by the Brandenburger Tor. From the top of the Wilhelmstrasse could be heard mingled cheers and curses.

"They are cheering your embassy," said Mylius.

But Laddie did not answer. He could not pierce the fog of apprehension that choked his brain. Not knowing what he feared, too bewildered to trace the logical course of hurrying calamity, he felt only a great weariness and a dull rage against all kings and bureaucrats and aged, selfish hypocrites who could, by manipulating newspapers, turn peaceful industry into this witch's cauldron. In the Leipzigerstrasse they had pressed towards a sudden clearing in the crowd. On the asphalt roadway letters of fire, thrown from some unseen height, spelt out the latest news from Russia. The laconic telegram flicked into darkness and was replaced by a portrait, dithering in many-coloured crudity, of the Emperor. And with a hoarse, excited cheer the mob closed over

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the open space and surged, with raucous violence, on its way.

But the next day the city was almost normal. At breakfast in his hotel Laddie was told that Russia had submitted. As an Englishman he was popular and regarded as a suitable recipient of each succeeding rumour. To escape unwelcome cordiality and in search of peace for his still tortured brain, he walked to his friend's lodgings and persuaded him to sit and smoke on the balcony of the Fürstenhof. Mylius was a shade more talkative.

"There is a hope," he said, with a breathless timidity that bore witness to his tense anxiety. "They cannot do this folly."

"*'Russia has submitted.'* *'England bleibt neutral.'* All these phrases. How dare they parrot in their nasty sheets the feelings of whole peoples! What share have you or any Russian or any Englishman in this unholy mess? Is it *our* policy that has created all these national susceptibilities?"

Mylius laid a hand on Laddie's arm.

"You speak too loud. And it is useless now to beat against the bars. The prison is of all our building. We slept, and the few toiled during the night. They were the workers. Who are we to criticize?"

Moodily Laddie stared at the gaunt façade of the Potsdam station. The city clocks began to strike midday. And suddenly, as though their chiming had found the essential note of the frail vase of

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human self-control and shattered it beyond repair, the streets and square burst into noise and turbulence. A special edition of some journal had appeared. Figures fought like animals about the paper-sellers. The shifting heads and shoulders of the crowd, a moment before sombre as boiling pitch, broke into flickering black and white as, one after another, papers were seized and held high above the throng. It was the mobilization news—the evil mid-day slip that, by its premature announcement, fanned once again the drooping fire of Berlin's lust for war. Even as the two on-lookers sat, petrified and speechless once again, the crowd broke and melted, leaving, scattered and crumpled on the ground like the last decencies of some now wanton horde, thousand upon thousand sheets of lying newspaper.

It was useless to leave the café just at present. Laddie and Mylius crouched in their chairs and the cigarettes, lying on the table between them, slowly dwindled. When at last the former entered the palm-filled lounge of the hotel, the porter handed him two telegrams.

The first read :

“In case you do not hear Postlethwaite wishes you to return at once.—DERMOT.”

And the second :

“Await instructions am watching developments carefully.—POSTLETHWAITE.”

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Both were from London. The second had been handed in ten minutes earlier than the first, and in Shaftesbury Avenue as against Charles Street, Haymarket. Laddie held them in his hand and read them through again.

"Now what in the world has happened?" he muttered to himself.

II

What had happened was, like most other things, a result of the Serajevo murder and, although trivial enough, not without its importance to the lives of the people concerned. Postlethwaite, with that blend of insight and fanaticism which had ever marked him, grasped instantly the hideous danger that threatened the world, but, having grasped it, sought to avert its coming by a method honourable above all others but, at the time, rudimentary and imperfect. From the day that the echo of that shot reverberated over Europe he threw the whole force of his brain and of his influence against nationalism as a political conception. He sought, from every corner of the earth, to link in the joint service of humanity, the scattered believers in the International; in the course of this effort he telegraphed to Dermot Gill to rouse the sympathies and to enlist the help of all likely groups and persons in the United States.

The time was short. Dermot did his best, and

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then, with his trunk full of notes and messages from sympathisers, hastened home. He called at Vanguard House on the morning of July 30th at twelve o'clock. After close on an hour's anxious talk, Postlethwaite rose.

"I have an engagement. You have tried hard, Gill, and so, God knows, have I. But we are straws in the wind. Come and see me to-morrow. I am sorry I must rush. Will you go up and see Garratt about Fried and Rolland?"

As they shook hands Dermot asked:

"Macallister is back, I suppose? I haven't been home yet."

"Good heavens! I'd forgotten. . . . Fortunate you mentioned it. I meant to wire last night."

The editor hurried to the telephone.

"Hullo! . . . Mr. Garratt, please. . . . That you? . . . Oh . . . is Mr. Garratt there?"

. . . .

"Who is that? Mrs. Cartmel?"

. . . .

"Will you give him a message? It's important. You're sure he has not gone out to lunch?"

. . . .

"I want a wire sent to Macallister. He has gone to Berlin; his address is in the book up there. He is to come home *at once*. Things look very bad. He might get caught. I have to go out now, so I rely on you to see that this is done. Good-bye."

While these instructions were being given, Dermot was moving to the door. He heard enough to realize the trend of the message before, as bidden,

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he hurried upstairs to Audley Garratt's room. The door was open, but a screen hid the room. As he entered, a lady he did not know rose from the desk-chair, crumpling a piece of paper in her hand.

"So much for that!" he heard her say, as she thrust the paper into her bag.

A man stood by the desk, his back towards the door. He replied:

"Damn it, Pamela, you're not going to . . ."

But she had seen Dermot and, ignoring the other, came forward with a questioning smile.

"Is Mr. Garratt out?" asked Dermot.

"He'll be back in a moment," she replied.

"This is his room. Will you wait?"

"Thank you."

The lady turned to her companion, who was surveying Dermot with sulky preoccupation.

"Come on, John. Lunch time."

The young man, dark and handsome, followed her to the door. Their feet tapped down the stairs.

Dermot had moments of disquieting and unexpected rapidity of mind. As he stood by Audley Garratt's desk, his eyes roving idly over the strew of books and papers, the name "Macallister" twitched suddenly at the fringe of his absorption. He looked again at the littered papers. Where was the name that had so strangely caught at his attention? Then he found it. An office telegram book lay open, pitched hastily across a desk-tray, and the top sheet was a telegram addressed to Macallister in Berlin. Dermot read it. An urgent

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summons to return. He remembered Postlethwaite's last telephone instruction. He noticed that the actual telegraph-form had been torn off; only the press-copy remained. Then he remembered the lady and the crumpled sheet of paper. And her words. She must have taken the editor's message. It was a woman. . . . Mrs. . . . Mrs. Something—— Postlethwaite had mentioned the name. She must have written the telegram. "So much for that."

He stood and thought a moment. Odd, to crumple it up like that. And the dark young man had seemed to protest. . . .

"Better be on the safe side," muttered Dermot and made a note of the copy-telegram's address.

Hardly had he done so, when Audley Garratt hurried into the room.

"Why, it's Gill! How are you? Awfully sorry to keep you waiting."

Their business talk took only a few minutes.

From Vanguard House, Dermot sought a post-office and telegraphed to Berlin.

Pamela Cartmel, as she walked beside him to a restaurant, soothed Dacre and successfully. She saw that her plan had a something impossible to a male. Besides, she had already begun to suspect that the old hostility to Laddie had lost its force. The inspiration had come to her with divine suddenness—as, in fact, she held the telephone receiver and grasped the tenor of the editor's message. She had never been satisfied that Janet was properly

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crushed. This second hammer-blow should settle matters. But Dacre could not be expected to understand ; she had kept back from him, skilfully, much that had happened. It seemed she had been less skilful this time. Perhaps she had made a mistake in showing her hand at all. He began again :

"About that telegram, Pamela. You must send it. You promised to. Besides it's a rotten thing to do. . . ."

"Dear old thing, don't be angry. I'm going to telegraph all right. I've got it in my bag. What is the matter ?"

"But you . . ."

Dacre stopped. Now that he came to think of it, she had only said "so much for that," and the crumpling of the form might have been an accident. He disliked making a fool of himself and there was a distinct danger of accusing her of something she had never thought to do, of something peculiarly beastly into the bargain. Then she would flame out at him. He grumbled inaudibly and dropped the subject.

A little further on she stopped.

"Here's a post-office. Wait for me and I'll get this sent off. Then you can lunch in peace."

She was not long inside, for the message was ready in her head.

It was the second of the two telegrams opened by Laddie in the lounge of the Berlin hotel.

III

Still holding the flimsy papers, Laddie went to his room. The change of aspect cleared his head. Hitherto he had not regarded the tragedy from the angle of personal behaviour. It was now very evident that the problem of himself was urgent and essential. Unreasonably, he felt aggrieved that Postlethwaite had sent no message sooner. And now this ambiguity. . . . Dermot was back in England, it appeared. Why? "If you do not hear——"; but he had heard. Then it occurred to him that Postlethwaite never signed telegrams except with the registered cipher of the paper. Yet this second message bore his name. It had been despatched earlier than Dermot's message. That was odd. He sat and thought hard.

"Believe I'll get along home," he decided at last, and rang for his bill.

As he did so, he realized suddenly that the time of waiting was over. Defiantly he assured an invisible critic that eagerness for Janet had not influenced his choice. He had sought no excuse for earlier departure. Not before this very instant had she held, during these recent days of stress, any predominating sway over his thoughts. The obscure horror, which had grown upon him since his return from Leipzig, during his sojourn in Berlin, was uninstructed and formless; but it was

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not selfish. Only now that he determined to go home, did he feel the beginnings of an immense excitement. He would receive his answer. He was neither sanguine nor despairing. Janet was just, and her decision would be right. He exulted in this heaven-sent reprieve. Europe and its troubles became, for a time, a cause for thankfulness. Normally there would have been six more weeks of waiting; more perhaps. Then it occurred to him that travel might be slow and difficult. Vaguely anxious to obviate possible delays, he set out for the Consulate to make enquiries.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE journey was long and wearisome but uneventful. The absence of sensation, which alone might have lulled the ache of his impatience, intensified the discomfort of crowded corridors, endless waiting, spasmodic opportunities of eating. Two hateful days were spent in Holland; money difficulties in Amsterdam, wild contradictions as to a boat from Flushing or the Hook. At last, with its load of hungry and dirty passengers, the train crawled into Liverpool Street on the morning of August 5th.

Laddie drove straight to the Dark Tower after a hasty wash and shave. Some instinct said Janet was in London. His fatigue vanished—or, more accurately, anticipation drugged reality. As he rang Lady Finedon's bell, he noticed, with petulant detachment, that the paint near the brass work was rubbed white where the metal polish had been imperfectly removed. The untidiness annoyed him.

"I want to see Miss Tring, please."

The butler stood aside for him to enter.

"I will tell her," he said, showing the visitor into a long, severely furnished room, used on party nights for cloaks and hats and at other times

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consecrated to Lady Finedon's secretary, committee meetings and similar indulgences.

Unbearably strung up, Laddie stood by the farthest window gazing at the door through which Janet would come. What she would say, she would say. The moment was too tremendous to prejudge. A sound on the stairs made him start. Someone was very slowly descending from the floor above; unwilling footsteps dragged across the hall. Then the door opened and Janet came in. She wore a long, dark-blue tunic with a skirt of black satin. Her pale beauty was unearthly, but for the eyes which were dark ringed and torpid.

"Laddie . . ." she faltered, "you have come . . ." She seemed to grip herself and spoke more quickly, with a pitiable briskness: "Is it really you? They said you were in Germany—shut off for years. No one knew what would happen to you. . . . It—it—it is very nice to see you." She ended lamely and came towards him unsmiling, with an outstretched hand.

His surprise at her strangeness could not conquer the longing for this moment.

"I got out," he answered and, stepping forward, took her two hands in his. "Tell you about it later. Janet—I have come for my answer. 'When you come back from Germany,' you said. Well, I have come back from Germany, Janet."

She had let him take her hands, leaving them unresponsive in his grasp. Now her whole body seemed to stiffen. She released herself and took something from the pocket of her skirt. As she

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stood there with her pure and troubled eyes meeting his, she seemed a child of twelve, for the first time apprised of evil.

"This is your safety-pin. I know where it was found. Oh, Laddie, *were* you Mrs. Cartmel's lover? And you told me nothing—that day on the moors, before you went abroad. . . ."

When he took the sense of her question, his very soul seemed stricken dead. The old weariness, but increased tenfold, enveloped him. He turned his back on her with a spasm of a sigh.

"At least I have my answer," he said in a low voice, and with bowed head walked past her to the door. On the threshold he stopped. All the love he had for this girl, all the anguish of his shattered hopes trembled in his voice:

"Could you not have written this? Had you not even the mercy to let me stay in Germany? My God—how I loved you, Janet! You were my life—and now it is all finished." Then with a hateful jauntiness: "Perhaps I had better take my pin. It is a gold one." He came back along the narrow, cheerless room.

She had not at first understood.

". . . You have your answer . . . ?" she repeated puzzled. Then, as he made to go, she saw what she had done. With a little cry she caught his arm. Her words came in a confused stream: "Laddie—I am a beast. A vile, cruel beast. Don't leave me, Laddie! I was mad. I never meant— Oh, sweetheart, can't you see you are everything? Forgive me, Laddie, for I only love

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you—love you. I suppose I have always loved you—and now I have hurt you mortally, horribly. As if it mattered what you have been or will be. You just are. Dear heart—— ”

She lay sobbing in his arms. He kissed her hair softly, repeatedly, muttering broken words of love. Peace descended on them both. The anchor was dropped.

.

An hour later he looked up at her, as he sat with his head pillowed on her lap.

“ You asked me a question some while ago. May I read you the reply ? ”

Tears came to her eyes.

“ It doesn't matter, darling,” she whispered ;
“ nothing matters now.”

He got to his feet, smiling happily.

“ I hate leaving loose ends. Is there a Bible among those books ? ”

After a brief search he found the place he wanted.

“ ‘ And Joseph said “ How can I do this wickedness ” . . . and he left his garment in her hand and got him out. . . . And she laid up his garment by her, until his lord came home.’ Only a little editing needed. And your answer, sweetest of Potiphars, is in the negative.”

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